



MEMORANDUM

To: Maryland Department of Health employees
From: Secretary Robert R. Neall
Subject: 2019 Novel Coronavirus Update (COVID-19)
Date: February 27, 2020

At Governor Larry Hogan's direction, our state continues to conduct strong and coordinated planning and response to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As part of this response, Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is sending you this important update on the situation.

We understand you may be concerned about how COVID-19 could affect you. We hope this message can answer your questions and give you accurate information about how to protect yourself and your family.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This is a new virus that hasn't caused illness in humans before.

Worldwide, COVID-19 has resulted in thousands of human infections, causing illness and in some cases death. Currently, most of these infections are in China and South Korea, with growing numbers of cases now being reported in Japan, Italy and Iran as well. This is changing, and is expected to continue to change, as this virus continues to spread. Cases have now been reported in more than 37 countries. Experts have expressed concern that COVID-19 will spread worldwide.

Has COVID-19 spread to the US?

In the United States, there has been a small but growing number of people who have become ill with COVID-19. Some are people who have returned from areas in Asia where COVID-19 was common. Other people have become ill through close contact with someone who has COVID-19. Close contact means being within about six feet of a person with COVID-19 for an extended period. People who live in the same home, or are caring for someone who is ill with COVID-19, are particularly vulnerable.

Currently, all U.S. cases are related to international travel. However, experts anticipate that the number of cases in the U.S. will increase through person-to-person transmission, as it has in other

communities in countries with no direct connection with travel to China.

What is the risk to the public right now?

As of today, the risk to the American public is low. Experts say that this is likely to change if current efforts to contain the virus outside of the U.S. are unsuccessful.

Could COVID-19 get worse?

COVID-19 has not spread throughout communities in the U.S. at this time. Community transmission is how the common cold and flu are spread - meaning people catch it from each other while going about their daily lives. Right now, there has been no community transmission of COVID-19 in the U.S.

Experts are saying that this will likely change. They state that in the coming weeks and months, we can expect to see more cases in the U.S. and worldwide.

Does anyone in Maryland have this new virus now?

No. Two people have been tested and those tests were negative.

Who is at risk right now?

Currently, people are at risk who:

- Recently traveled to China
- Have close, personal contact with those recent travelers
- Have close, personal contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Care for people with COVID-19

Should I cancel my family trip abroad?

Currently the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China and South Korea. They also advise people who are elderly and those with chronic conditions to avoid nonessential travel to Japan, Italy and Iran.

As more countries report community spread of COVID-19, the number of countries added to the travel advisory list may increase.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is spread just like colds or flu through:

- coughing and sneezing, which creates respiratory droplets
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Fever
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- In more severe cases, pneumonia (infection in the lungs)

What should I do if I think I am sick with COVID-19?

If you have recently traveled internationally or were in contact with someone with COVID-19, and you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, seek medical care right away. Follow these steps:

- Call your doctor or emergency room before you go
- Tell them about your recent travel and close contacts (such as people in your household)
- Wear a mask if one is available

If someone has COVID-19, what will happen to them?

Most people recover from this infection. Close to 80 percent will have mild or moderate symptoms. Some people may be advised to recover at home and isolate themselves from others. These individuals should call their physician or clinic if their symptoms get worse.

Some COVID-19 infections can lead to serious illness, and in some cases death. If someone has a more serious illness from COVID-19, they may be admitted to the hospital. Older people and those with pre-existing medical problems have a greater risk for serious illness. Examples of pre-existing medical problems are: cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or other conditions impacting the immune system's ability to fight germs.

Should I wear a face mask when I go out in public?

No. Currently the risk to Maryland residents remains low, and face masks are not recommended for the general public. There is no community spread of COVID-19 in the state or the U.S. at this time. Masks can be useful in some settings, such as in a hospital or clinic waiting room, to prevent someone who has a respiratory illness from spreading it to others.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

Take everyday preventive steps that are always recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illnesses like colds, flu, and COVID-19:

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- **Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer** with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** with a tissue, your sleeve, or your elbow.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched objects and surfaces using standard cleaning practices.

- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.
- **If you are sick, stay home** except to get medical care. Inform your supervisor of any illness.

Is there a vaccine or medicine I can get for COVID-19?

Not yet, because COVID-19 is a new disease. However, many experts are at work developing a vaccine. As with any new vaccine, it must be tested to make certain it is safe and effective. It may take more than a year for a COVID-19 vaccine to become readily available.

There is also no specific medicine currently to cure COVID-19 because it is a new disease. However, people who have COVID-19 should get medical care to lessen the severity of symptoms.

How can I be more prepared for COVID-19?

- Have an adequate supply of nonprescriptive drugs and other health supplies on hand, which could include: pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
- Check your regular prescription drugs to make sure you have an adequate supply. Refill your prescriptions if needed.
- Have a thermometer, tissues, and hand sanitizer in case you become ill and must stay at home to recover.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.
- Have a two-week supply of water and food in your home.

Is there anything else I should know?

- **Do not stigmatize people of any ethnicity.** People who have not recently traveled to China or other affected regions, and have not had close contact with a person who is ill with COVID-19, are at no greater risk of this disease than you. Viruses do not target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds.
- **Stay informed and only get information from trusted, official sources. Be especially wary of myths, rumors, and misinformation circulating online and elsewhere.** Health information spread on social media is frequently inaccurate.

The MDH website provides updated information about COVID-19 at <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also has current information at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

To receive the new weekly CDC email newsletter about COVID-10, enter your email address, and type COVID-19 in the search box at this link:

https://tools.cdc.gov/campaignproxyservice/subscriptions.aspx?topic_id=USCDC_2067