



Rhode Island Department of Health
3 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908 | www.health.ri.gov

For: Immediate release

Date: February 20, 2020

Contact: [Joseph Wendelken](mailto:Joseph.Wendelken@health.ri.gov) (401-378-0704)

Coronavirus Preparedness and Coordination On-Going in Rhode Island

As efforts are on-going at the federal level to respond to the international coronavirus situation, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is continuing to take extensive preparedness measures locally. These include coordinating closely with other State agencies, community organizations, healthcare providers, healthcare facilities, schools, and colleges and universities, among numerous other partners as a part of readiness planning and to provide education, guidance, and support.

Since late December there have been more than 75,000 cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (or COVID-19) diagnosed and more than 2,000 fatalities. The vast majority of these cases and fatalities have been in China. There have been 15 confirmed cases in the United States. There have not been any confirmed cases in Rhode Island.

“We are not seeing widespread community transmission of the virus in the United States. The risk level for Rhode Islanders right now remains low,” said Director of Health Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH. “However, this is an evolving situation. For that reason, we have been taking extensive, comprehensive preparedness steps for several weeks and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.”

Given the global dynamics of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 outbreak, it is possible that Rhode Island could have a case in the near future. This is why RIDOH is coordinating a process, in accordance with federal guidance, to ensure that anyone who has been in China in the previous 14 days is doing self-monitoring for symptoms for 14 days and is limiting their movement locally. (People in this situation are being instructed to not attend work or school, and to avoid public places and gatherings for 14 days.) Once 14 symptom-free days pass since someone's last potential exposure to Coronavirus Disease 2019, there is no longer a health concern about that person getting sick or spreading the illness.

RIDOH is partnering with federal officials to implement this monitoring program, which started on February 3, 2020. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is routing all flights carrying people who have traveled to China within the last 14 days through one of 11 U.S. airports designated to receive and screen travelers. People returning from Hubei Province, which is the center of the outbreak in China, are not continuing their travel; they are being quarantined domestically near the international airport where they landed. People coming from other areas of China are being screened for symptoms at their U.S. arrival airport. People who are symptomatic are being isolated near their arrival airport. People who are not coming from Hubei Province *and* who are not symptomatic are continuing to their final destinations.

For those whose destination is Rhode Island, RIDOH is notified of their arrival and is coordinating with these travelers so that they understand the self-monitoring guidance and guidance on how to seek medical care if it is needed.

"People are not traveling to Rhode Island from China if they are coming from the area where the outbreak is centered, and they are not coming to Rhode Island from China if they have symptoms of Coronavirus Disease 2019," said Dr. Alexander-Scott. "Many of the travelers from China are not of Chinese origin. They are international business

people. It is important that we all remember that someone's race or ethnicity is not a risk factor for Coronavirus Disease 2019."

RIDOH is coordinating with other State agencies and community organizations to ensure that people who are remaining at home after traveling from China have the support services they need. This includes support with everyday needs, such as prescriptions and groceries. The organizations that have provided support include agencies throughout the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), the Rhode Island Food Bank, the American Red Cross, and other members of Rhode Island's Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD).

In addition to coordinating the process for returning travelers, RIDOH has taken a number of other preparedness steps. They include:

- Establishing an Incident Command System response, which is how RIDOH and other state agencies organize to prepare for (or respond to) an urgent situation that requires extensive coordination. It includes staff from the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA), the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM). It also includes staff from RIDOH's State Health Laboratories, Center for Acute Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response, and Center for Public Health Communication, among other areas of RIDOH.
- Regularly communicating with RIDOH's Infectious Disease and Epidemiology Advisory Committee (IDEAC) to track any clinical and epidemiological developments related to Coronavirus Disease 2019. (IDEAC is a group of infectious disease physicians throughout Rhode Island that provides guidance to RIDOH leadership on emerging infectious disease matters.)
- Maintaining a robust system to receive and follow up on illness reports from Rhode Island healthcare providers.
- Regularly sending to local healthcare providers summaries of the national situation, criteria to guide evaluation of patients, and guidance on specimen collection, testing, and reporting.
- Coordinating closely with healthcare facilities and emergency medical services (EMS) providers to ensure their preparedness.

- Communicating regularly to community partners, such as schools, faith leaders, and municipal officials.

Because human coronaviruses most commonly spread through respiratory droplets, Rhode Islanders are reminded to take the same measures that healthcare providers recommend annually to prevent the spread of the flu and other viruses.

- Get your flu shot and encourage the people around you to do the same.
- Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Flu is spread through coughing or sneezing on other people or into your hands. Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent others from getting sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.

The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including Coronavirus Disease 2019. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it.

More information about Coronavirus Disease 2019 is available in multiple languages at health.ri.gov/covid

###

- For general health questions, contact the Health Information Line: 401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711 or visit www.health.ri.gov
- [View previous RIDOH press releases and announcements](#)

- [Like us on Facebook](#)
- [Follow us on Twitter - @RIHEALTH](#)
- [Order printed material](#)