



Rhode Island Department of Health

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2019 Novel Coronavirus – Background

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BACKGROUND

Since late December there have been more than 80,000 cases of coronavirus disease 2019 – or COVID-19 – diagnosed and more than 2,700 fatalities worldwide. The vast majority of these cases and fatalities have been in China. That figure includes travel-related cases, cases of person-to-person spread, and people repatriated from China and the Diamond Princess cruise ship that was docked in Japan.

Given the global dynamics of the COVID-19 outbreak, it is possible that Rhode Island could have a case in the near future. While the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is reminding Rhode Islanders about the health measures they can take to help prevent the spread of the virus in the community, Rhode Island is continuing to coordinate with the federal government to limit or prevent the spread of COVID-19. The coronavirus is scary, but it is important that we not panic as we prepare for the possibility of seeing cases in Rhode Island.

RIDOH is coordinating a process to ensure that anyone who has been in China in the previous 14 days is self-monitoring for symptoms for 14 days and is limiting their movement. (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 COVID-19, 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 in 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.

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 offered support include the following agencies:

- Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS)
- Rhode Island Food Bank
- American Red Cross
- Rhode Island's Voluntary 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 Epidemiology Advisory Committee (IDEAC) to track any clinical and epidemiological developments related to COVID-19. (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 the 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, 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.

More information about COVID-19 is available in multiple languages at health.ri.gov/covid.