February 27, 2020

Greetings colleagues-

I wanted to send an update regarding the new coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19). **Importantly, at the present, the risk to the general public is low and Colorado has no cases.** However, there is a lot of activity going on regarding the international outbreak, which raises many questions about what this means for the U.S., Colorado, and our collective planning and response efforts. We are sharing the following information to provide recent updates and information.

As of 2/27/2020, there are now over 82,000 confirmed human infections and over 2,700 deaths reported due to COVID-19 around the world. Fortunately, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that the outbreak in China appears to have peaked between January 23 and February 2, 2020 and has been declining steadily since then. On the other hand, infection has been spreading to other countries around the world, with 60 cases having currently been reported in the U.S. There’s a lot of speculation about whether the recent increases mean that the outbreak has now become a pandemic. The decision about whether to upgrade the outbreak to a “pandemic” is based on an ongoing assessment of the geographical spread of the virus, the severity of disease it causes, and the impact it has on society. COVID-19 has the potential to become a pandemic, but WHO has not yet made that determination based on current disease activity. The CDC Situation Summary can be found [HERE](#) and the WHO situation dashboard can be found [HERE](#).

Data regarding how easily the infection can spread, the severity of disease, the death rate, and who is at risk for severe infection are still being collected based on experiences in other countries. In short, what we understand right now is that COVID-19 is a respiratory illness spreading from person-to-person; symptoms can range from mild (like a cold) to severe (pneumonia and hospitalization). Persons at older age or with significant underlying medical problems appear to be at higher risk for severe disease. The public health system, across the state and nation, is focused on slowing the spread of the virus, preparing for a potential pandemic, and ensuring the safety of the communities we serve. At TCHD, we are preparing for potential widespread transmission of COVID-19, even though there are currently no cases in Colorado. Below are details about TCHD’s planning efforts and how to get more information.

**What is TCHD Doing?**

TCHD is working to ensure we are prepared to respond should the TCHD jurisdiction be impacted with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and continue preparations if higher levels of disease occur in our region.

- We are utilizing our Public Health Emergency Operations Plan, developed many years ago for situations such as this one, which includes activating our pandemic and community containment plans in the event that we have positive cases. Our response plans contain tools and protocols to assess potential exposures and ill people and implement disease control measures.
years, we’ve built strong relationships with our emergency management and health and medical partners to ensure our response is proactive, strong and collaborative.

- In order to effectively respond to the tasks associated with this evolving incident, TCHD has activated our Public Health Incident Management Team (PHIMT) in support of public information, logistics, tactical, and planning efforts.
- We are participating on regular calls hosted by CDC to ensure we stay up-to-date and understand current guidance and recommendations.
- We are also participating on regular statewide calls with CDPHE and other local public health agencies (LPHAs) to understand the current situation and associated impacts in Colorado, as well as to coordinate efforts related to protocols around a potential case, conducting the necessary investigation, and information sharing.
- We are working with CDPHE and other LPHAs and following federal guidance regarding monitoring travelers who return to CO from China or other affected areas, testing for the infection, and implementing necessary restriction of movement of travelers who might have been exposed internationally.
- TCHD, other LPHAs, and CDPHE are fielding calls regarding patients with a history of travel to China with respiratory symptoms to assess for potential COVID-19. A technical term called Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) is being used by CDC to define a person who had a known or suspect exposure, has concerning symptoms, and is being tested for COVID-19. So far in Colorado, 16 PUIs have been tested — 12 tests have been negative and 4 tests are currently pending.
- We have established a TCHD coronavirus web page that is complimentary to both the CDPHE web page and associated information from CDC.

Questions/Disease Reporting:
- CO HELP (1-877-462-2911) is activated for COVID-19 for questions from the public. As a reminder, the Colorado Health Emergency Line for the public is a toll-free hotline for up-to-the-minute public health information.
- To report a suspect case or for additional guidance, please call TCHD Communicable Disease Epidemiology: 303-220-9200 (business hours) or 720-200-1486 (after hours)
- General Colorado specific information about confirmed cases, negative tests, and pending tests: https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/2019-novel-coronavirus

Partner Resources:
- Colorado Specific Information includes:
  - Letter for School Nurses and Childcare – Attached. Note: CDC is currently updating guidance for schools.
- **Law Enforcement:** Law Enforcement should utilize the same precautions they employ when they encounter a person with an unknown respiratory illness. Additionally, if they are dispatched to a scene with known concerns with COVID-19, they may follow the same guidance as provided to EMS. *Note: CDC is currently finalizing guidance for Law Enforcement*

- **Resource/Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Needs:** As previously communicated by CDPHE, for the purposes of this outbreak, if you experience any supply shortages, please reach out directly to TCHD through the **24/7 EPR Line at 720.200.1637**. As the incident evolves, TCHD, our health and medical partners, and our local emergency managers will continue to evaluate processes to ensure we are appropriately managing resources and following existing protocols for the acquisition of additional supplies. The CDC has released strategies for **optimizing the supply of N95 Respirators** as well as information on the **healthcare supply of Personal Protective Equipment** to assist in ensuring an adequate supply of PPE for the response to COVID and other day-to-day clinic care. CDPHE has drafted a Concept of Operations for the COVID-2019 PPE Shortage that is currently being reviewed by local public health and will be made available on the CDPHE **COVID-2019 website** listing resources for LPHAs and healthcare providers once finalized. They have also crafted a **supply chain guidance** for Colorado. Manufacturers and distributors of the PPE recommended for use in response to COVID-2019 are taking steps to minimize the shortage of PPE supplies to include limiting the amount of PPE that will be supplied to any one facility or agency to prevent the stockpiling of supplies and ensure more equal distribution of resources. For any other incident that may impact your agency or facility, please remember to follow our existing resource mobilization process by contacting your local emergency manager.

**Are You Getting Questions on the Use of Facemasks?**

- At this time, CDC does not recommend the use of facemasks among the general public. While limited person-to-person spread of COVID-19 among close contacts has been detected, this virus is not currently spreading in the community in the U.S.

- If you are not sick:
  - Members of the general public in the U.S. DO NOT need to use facemasks. CDC does NOT recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.
  - Masks should be reserved for people who are sick, so they can protect others from getting infected.

**Educational Materials/Print Resources:**

- **CDC has created easy to use handouts and posters in English, Spanish and Simplified Chinese and can be found here:** CDC Handouts and Posters. The materials include one pagers regarding what you need to know about COVID-19, what to do if you are sick, stop the spread of germs poster, and symptoms of COVID-19.
Business/Organization Planning and Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020** – includes strategies for employers to use now and planning considerations for employers

What Can You Do? We as individuals and families can prepare and practice now.

- COVID-19 is spread person to person (likely via cough, sneeze or close contact). As such, there are some basic things you can do to protect yourself from COVID-19 and other viruses (such as seasonal flu):
  - wash hands often with soap and water
  - cover your mouth when you cough/sneeze with your elbow or a tissue
  - avoid people who are ill (keep your distance from others who are coughing & sneezing)
  - stay home when ill
  - get your annual flu shot

- If cases are identified and begin to spread in Colorado, it is possible that our communities could be impacted. In that regard, it’s a good idea to plan ahead like you would for a “snow day”.
  Steps that you and your family can take to be prepared include the following:
  - Try to get an extra month’s worth of prescription meds, if possible, in case there are supply chain disruptions.
  - Make sure you have enough non-perishable food to last your household through several weeks of staying at home in case there is an intense wave of transmission in the community.
  - Think about how you will continue to work if your child’s school is closed.
  - Think about your plans to participate in large gatherings or travel to locations with known cases of COVID-19 and prepare for the change that they may be cancelled.
  - Think through how you will take care of sick family members while trying not to get infected.
  - Make plans for childcare if you become sick, or when your child is sick.

As this situation continues to evolve, we will share significant updates as we have more information and detail to provide.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing partnership and support!

Michele Askenazi, MPH
Director of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communicable Disease Surveillance