

Delaware Monitoring Returning Travelers from China for 2019 Novel Coronavirus

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is providing an update on its efforts to monitor for potential cases of 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). DPH continues to coordinate closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local health care providers to identify potential cases, and has updated its guidance for risk assessment and monitoring travelers returning from China.

“While there are currently no cases of 2019-nCoV in Delaware and the risk of this novel coronavirus spreading to the general public remains low, DPH is working to implement appropriate monitoring protocols and disease prevention strategies to further reduce any chance of transmission,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “These protocols are based on not only our past experience with monitoring returning travelers during the Ebola outbreak, but also on CDC guidance and evolving knowledge about this virus.”

Risk is based on exposure. Only those individuals with recent travel to China or those who had contact with someone who recently traveled and is ill have an increased risk of becoming ill. For persons without an associated travel risk, it should be assumed that respiratory illnesses are not 2019-nCoV.

As of Feb. 3, 2020, all persons returning from Hubei Province in China, as well as symptomatic persons returning from mainland China, will be quarantined for 14 days near a United States airport of entry, per federal orders.

All asymptomatic travelers (travelers who are not sick with fever/cough/shortness of breath) arriving from mainland China

outside of Hubei Province will be monitored by DPH for symptoms for 14 days after their return. During that time, DPH (or its designee) will be in daily contact with those persons to check their status and health. Individuals will be asked to stay at home during this period while self-monitoring for symptoms. If any of these persons shows symptoms of fever, cough and/or shortness of breath, they should call DPH right away to determine next steps, which may include transport to a local hospital for evaluation, isolation and testing.

Currently there are two individuals in Delaware who are being monitored. These persons are not sick, and exhibit no symptoms consistent with coronavirus. No additional information about these individuals will be provided. Individuals being monitored for symptoms are NOT considered Patients Under Investigation (PUI), which are those individuals who meet criteria for testing based on symptoms and travel history. There are no PUIs in Delaware at this time. DPH will begin reporting the number of returning travelers being monitored, as well as PUIs, on its website by Monday, Feb. 10. Numbers will be updated every Tuesday and Friday afterward.

Individuals who traveled from China prior to Feb. 3, 2020, are asked to self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after their return. If they become ill within 14 days of their return, they should avoid contact with others, and call ahead to their health care provider to discuss their recent travel, symptoms, and next steps. The health care provider should in turn contact DPH to coordinate next steps. Individuals who returned from China prior to Feb. 3, 2020, do not need to be excluded from school or work. DPH continues to encourage employers and administrators to review their own health policies to make decisions regarding exclusion from work/school for these individuals.

As DPH continues to monitor the situation, health officials are also emphasizing that Asian American/Pacific Islander individuals are at no higher risk of carrying the 2019 novel

coronavirus than any other individual. DPH urges people not to make assumptions that someone might be ill or could become ill based on their accent, background or skin color.

“You are much more likely to become sick with a common cold virus or flu than to be diagnosed with the 2019 novel coronavirus,” said Dr. Rattay. “Since the start of the flu season, there have been nearly 3,000 diagnosed cases of flu and we just learned of the seventh flu death this season in Delaware. Our Delaware residents of Chinese descent are important members of our community and are not at an increased risk for spreading the coronavirus.”

Symptoms of 2019-nCoV are most similar to lower respiratory infections with patients having fever, cough and shortness of breath. There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for 2019-nCoV infection. Many individuals infected with 2019-nCoV recover with rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking over-the-counter medications to help relieve symptoms.

If at any point laboratory testing confirms a case of 2019-nCoV in a Delaware resident, the available details and protective recommendations would be shared with both the affected parties and the public as quickly as possible.

Right now, 2019-nCoV has not been found to be spreading widely in the United States, so there are no additional precautions recommended for the general public to take. The best guidance at this point is to take the same everyday precautions recommended for avoiding colds and flu:

- Get your flu vaccine if you have not already.
- Stay home when you are sick and avoid well people as much as possible.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Practice good hand hygiene – frequently wash hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

The U.S. Department of State issued a travel advisory on

January 31, 2020, advising U.S. citizens not to travel to China due to the ongoing situation involving 2019-nCoV. Travelers should be prepared for travel restrictions to be put into effect with little or no advance notice, and commercial carriers have reduced or suspended routes to and from China. If you are considering a trip to China, keep an eye on the news, federal travel advisories, and be aware of this evolving situation.

DPH will continue to update the public as more information becomes available. For more information on 2019-nCoV, including downloadable fliers, visit <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph>.

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The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.