

# Division of Public Health: 2 Patients in Kent County Under Investigation for Coronavirus Disease

STANTON (March 2, 2020) – Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) Director Dr. Karyl Rattay announced at a press conference today that DPH has two Patients Under Investigation (PUIs) for coronavirus disease in Kent County, who had traveled to a country under a travel alert. Three previous PUIs were tested and all came back negative.

As Delaware continues to prepare for community spread of the virus, Dr. Rattay also announced that the Division of Public Health Lab in Smyrna now has the capability to test for coronavirus disease known as COVID-19. The tests for the two patients in Kent County will be the first run at the lab. To date, no one in Delaware has tested positive for COVID-19.

Dr. Rattay said the DPH Lab will have the ability to turn around tests in approximately a day for COVID-19 and provide either a presumptive positive or negative result. The CDC will provide confirmatory testing.

“Despite the increased number of cases of COVID-19 in the United States, the immediate health risk to Delawareans and most Americans remains low,” Dr. Rattay said at the press conference at ChristianaCare’s John H. Ammon Medical Educational Center at Christiana Hospital. “We are grateful now to have the ability to test for the virus at our lab and will announce the results of the two patients in Kent County as soon as we can. Going forward, we will continue to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance and work with our health care partners to determine when it is

appropriate to test patients for coronavirus disease.”

Dr. Rattay also announced that the Division of Public Health will open a call center to field inquiries from the public by mid-week. The phone number will be announced when the call center is ready. DPH is also issuing updated guidance for monitoring returning travelers as new countries have been added to the list of countries with coronavirus disease-related travel alerts. Any travelers returning from a country with a Level 2 or higher Travel Alert in the last 14 days and who:

- Have fever, cough and/or shortness of breath, should contact DPH at 1-888-295-5156 to discuss next steps. Those who need to call 9-1-1 for a medical emergency should advise dispatchers of your recent travel and symptoms;
- Do not have fever, cough and/or shortness of breath (asymptomatic travelers), should contact DPH at 1-888-295-5156 for instructions on self-monitoring.

Asymptomatic returning travelers are asked to stay home (no work, school, attending public gatherings) during this 14-day period. If a returning traveler develops symptoms during this time, and there is no medical emergency, they should contact DPH instead of calling 9-1-1 or visiting a walk-in or urgent care facility.

“Today, there are important things that Delawareans can do to stay healthy, to reduce the burden on the health care system, and to prepare if community transmission of coronavirus disease does happen in our state,” said Department of Health of Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a practicing family physician. In addition to guidance for individuals, she also encouraged Delaware employers to review their plans to operate with adaptations such as telework and flexible sick leave policies, as well as how to respond if an employee does get sick.

“Most importantly, in the event of an outbreak locally, we will need employers to stress to employees that they not to come work when they are sick,” Secretary Walker said.

As of March 2, there are more than 89,000 cases of coronavirus disease worldwide, including more than 3,000 deaths. There are 43 cases and two deaths to date in the United States. Consistent with the CDC’s guidance, Dr. Rattay said community spread is likely to increase in the United States. “Our efforts, where before they were focused on containment of the disease, are now focused on mitigating the impact of it when it does occur.” CDC officials also have said it is important for families and communities to prepare for what they would do if community spread occurs by recommending:

- Schools review their infection prevention and control plans in the event there is a local outbreak.
- Employers review their contingency plans to ensure they are able to operate with adaptations and respond if an employee gets sick.
- Individuals and families understand steps they can take to help slow the spread of illness, including avoiding travel to hard-hit areas and staying home when sick.

To date, Delaware:

- Has activated the Division of Public Health’s State Health Operations Center to allow for enhanced response coordination;
- Maintains communication and outreach with federal, state and local partners;
- Is monitoring asymptomatic (not sick) individuals returning from Mainland China to ensure they do not develop symptoms;
- Provides symptom monitoring guidance for residents returning to Delaware from China, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Iran;
- Participates in frequent calls with health care systems,

EMS and first responder agencies and other state agency partners;

- Provides information to health care professionals, businesses and educational settings; and
- Has reviewed and adapted current pandemic flu plans for COVID-19.

DPH has a strong relationship with hospitals, EMS, and first responder agencies through its partnership with the state's Department of Safety and Homeland Security (DSHS). Staff have been holding regular calls with hospitals, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency (DEMA), DSHS and EMS agencies.

Delaware is experiencing a particularly serious flu season with more than 5,500 lab-confirmed cases and 11 deaths statewide, and in addition to getting your flu shot, DPH recommends everyday measures that people can take to prevent the spread of all infections, which would also slow the spread of coronavirus disease:

- Cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hand. If you use a tissue, dispose of it right away.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, including the backs of your hands and under your nails.
- Clean surfaces at home, work or school that you use often.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- If you are healthy, the CDC does not recommend buying or using face masks. If you are infected, however, a mask can help prevent the spread of a virus.

Symptoms of COVID-19 can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. The symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure. Reported illnesses have ranged from people with little to no symptoms (similar to the common cold) to people being severely ill and dying.

For more information and updates related to COVID-19, visit the DPH website at [de.gov/coronavirus](https://de.gov/coronavirus), where materials can be found in English, Simplified Chinese/Mandarin, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole. In addition to updates on the global coronavirus disease outbreak, the website also contains tips for Delawareans, and the number of returning travelers that DPH is currently monitoring, which is updated twice each week on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The most accurate and timely information regarding this outbreak is available through the Division of Public Health, as well as the CDC's website and social media channels.