

Division of Public Health Urges At-Risk Populations to Follow CDC Guidance on Coronavirus Disease



The Division of Public Health's coronavirus call center at its State Health Operations Center (SHOC) in Smyrna is open to take questions from the public, schools, medical providers, state agencies and community organizations. The call center number is 1-866-408-1899.

NEW CASTLE (March 9, 2020) – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) advises older Delawareans and people with severe chronic health conditions to follow guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encouraging them to “avoid crowds as much as possible” as a way to reduce their risk of contracting coronavirus disease.

The CDC has found that early data suggests older people are twice as likely to suffer a serious illness from coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19. Delaware has no confirmed cases, but DPH and other state partners are planning for the likelihood of community transmission.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, recommended on Sunday that those at greatest risk – older Americans and those with severe chronic health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease and diabetes – should abstain from travel.

If you are in the higher-risk groups for getting very sick

from COVID-19, the CDC recommends you should:

- Avoid non-essential travel such as long plane trips and defer all cruise trips worldwide.
- Avoid crowds, especially in poorly ventilated space, as much as possible.
- When you go out in public, including to doctor appointments or dialysis, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often.
- Take everyday precaution to keep space between yourself and others.
- If an outbreak does occur, stay home as much as possible.
- Stock up on supplies, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, food and water, and other household items.
- Have a plan in the event you get sick, including discussing with household members, other relatives, and friends to discuss what you might need.

“Because Delaware has a high percentage of older residents and people with severe underlying health conditions, we urge them and their families to follow the CDC’s recommendation to avoid crowds as much as possible,” said Department of Health of Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a practicing family physician. “While we are grateful that we don’t have any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our state, we are planning for community transmission of the disease. We urge Delawareans to take these important steps to reduce their exposure to the virus and to prepare when community transmission does happen here.”

Older Delawareans, people with severe chronic health conditions and all other members of the public can call the Division of Public Health’s Coronavirus Call Center at 1-866-408-1899 or TTY at 1-800-232-5460 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Or email DPHCall@delaware.gov. For the latest on Delaware’s response, go to de.gov/coronavirus

“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,” said Dr. Karyl Rattay, director of the Division of Public Health. Delaware has no confirmed cases of COVID-19. As of March 9, 15 people have been tested in Delaware; all have been negative. In addition, testing and results are pending for three individuals, two in New Castle County, and one in Kent County. DPH is currently monitoring 18 returning travelers.

The CDC also urges long-term care facilities to be vigilant in preventing the introduction and spread of COVID-19. The Division of Public Health and DEMA are working with DHSS’ Division of Health Care Quality (DHCQ), Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD) and other community partners to implement strategies and restrictions to keep residents safe and healthy.

Finally, DPH advises that community preparedness planning – recommended by CDC – should include older adults and people with disabilities, and the organizations that support them in their communities, to ensure their needs are taken into consideration. Many of these individuals live in the community, and many depend on services and supports provided in their homes or in the community to maintain their independence and their health. For family members and caregivers providing support, the CDC recommends these steps:

- Know what medications your loved one is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- Monitor food and other medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and create a back-up plan.
- Stock up on non-perishable food items to have on hand in your home to minimize trips to stores.
- If you care for a loved one living in a care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of the other residents frequently and know the protocol if there is

an outbreak.

DPH continues to monitor travelers arriving in the U.S. from countries with a Level 2 or higher Travel Alert (China, Italy, Japan, Iran or South Korea). The CDC recommended that such travelers be monitored for 14 days after their return. During the 14-day period, these persons are asked to remain at home while self-monitoring for symptoms. If any of these persons shows symptoms of fever, cough and/or shortness of breath, the person should call DPH at 1-866-408-1899 immediately to determine next steps, which may include transport to a local hospital for evaluation and testing.

As of March 9, there are more than 111,000 cases of coronavirus disease worldwide, including more than 3,800 deaths. In the United States, there are more than 600 cases and 22 deaths to date. Consistent with the CDC's guidance, Dr. Rattay said community spread is likely to continue increasing across the country.

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.

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, medical providers, school superintendents, the Delaware Emergency Management

Agency (DEMA), DSHS and EMS agencies.

Delaware is experiencing a particularly serious flu season with 6,000 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, for 20 seconds. Or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean commonly used surfaces such as computers, desktops, countertops cabinets, handles and more with disinfectant.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- If you are healthy, the CDC does not recommend buying or using face masks. You should only wear a mask if a health care provider tells you do so.

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, 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 regularly.

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.

View the video from March 7, 2020 on the lab testing happening at the State's Public Health Laboratory: