

March 12, 2020

The coronavirus (COVID-19) situation continues to evolve rapidly and as a result, information and guidance change frequently. On March 10, 2020, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont announced Public Health and Civil Preparedness Emergencies, effective through September 9, 2020. While the term "emergency" can raise concern for people, please know that *there is no cause for panic*. The declaration of these emergencies allows additional resources and supplies to be deployed to the state of Connecticut - resources that are necessary to identify infection and slow the spread of coronavirus in our communities.

To date, the Orange Health Department has been maintaining situational awareness through weekly teleconferences with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the CT Department of Public Health (DPH). We are conducting countless activities related to preparedness and communicating regularly with town leaders and community partners.

While we cannot predict the impact of COVID-19 with great certainty, we can assure you that there are many trusted and experienced community partners in our public health system working together to protect our communities. We are grateful for these partnerships.

Below are some categorized key points and links to resources. It is a comprehensive list. *Please read through to the end:*

Practice Everyday Preventive Actions Now

Practice and remind others of the importance of using everyday preventive actions that can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses. Yes, these are simple strategies *and they work:*

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue. Throw the tissue in a lined trash container.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Germs spread this way.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles) using a regular household detergent and water.
 - If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent and water prior to disinfection. For disinfection, a list of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved products is available at [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Fighting Products](#). Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Always wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.
- Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- Get an annual flu shot... and future vaccines that are developed to fight new communicable illnesses.

Decisions Regarding Cancellation or Postponement of Events and Activities

As of March 12, 2020, there are 3 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Connecticut but we can expect that to change. We are watching for signs that the disease will swell and require social distancing measures such as school closures or cancellation of public events. Since these measures are very disruptive, they should be implemented based on timely assessment of the evolving situation.

Decision-makers should take common sense steps regarding event cancellation or postponement and make decisions on a case-by-case basis based on their specific situation, event space, target audience, and the ability of community partners, staff, volunteers, and attendees to participate or attend.

On March 9, 2020, Governor Lamont notified Executive Branch agency employees of actions that will be implemented to prevent the spread of coronavirus. At this time, these actions apply only to CT state employees but can be used as a framework for decision-making:

- Any state of Connecticut-organized large meetings, conferences or gatherings that are anticipated to have over 100 people in attendance between now and April 30 will be evaluated to determine if the events should move to teleconference or be postponed.
- For events or meetings with large numbers of people within arm's length of each other, encourage those who are at higher risk due to age (70 or older); those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems, to dial in to participate or not attend.

Governor Lamont: *"While these actions may feel overly disruptive to some given the very few cases we've seen so far in Connecticut, I believe they are appropriate to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and I'm encouraging all employers in Connecticut to take similar actions."*

Key Messages

- People without symptoms should not be tested for COVID-19. Testing individuals with no symptoms is not recommended by CDC.
- If you were with someone who does not have symptoms, the risk of transmission is very low.
- There are many respiratory illnesses circulating in Connecticut, such as the flu and the common cold. Having respiratory symptoms DOES NOT mean you have COVID-19.
- People are at higher risk for COVID-19 if they have symptoms of the virus (cough, fever, shortness of breath) **AND** if they were in contact with a positive case of COVID-19 or have traveled to locations with community transmission.
- Someone is considered a contact if they have had direct, face-to-face contact with a person with COVID-19.
- People who are severely ill or think they have COVID-19 should call their healthcare provider for instructions. These people SHOULD NOT go directly to a healthcare facility without first calling a healthcare provider (unless they are experiencing a medical emergency).
- People sick with mild symptoms of respiratory illness should stay home to take care of themselves and stay away from others. This includes distancing themselves from people in their household *and* vehicles.

- Our local health care systems are preparing for what could be a surge in patients. That means the ability to access emergency care may start to change in the coming weeks and months.
- Hospitals, clinics, health centers, medical groups, and other healthcare systems are enhancing their efforts to screen and care for people. This may include screening patients *outside* before you enter the building. Follow instructions on all posted signage.
- Connecticut nursing homes have been directed by the CT DPH to impose restrictions on all visitors, except when a current health state (e.g. end-of-life care) is in question.

Be Ready by Being Informed - Resources to Post and Share with Others

CDC Coronavirus website (main page). Lots of exceptional resources here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Communication resources such as fact sheets and posters:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/workplace-school-and-home-guidance.pdf>

Guidance for homes, communities, schools, businesses, and more:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

Recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Information for Connecticut residents: ct.gov/coronavirus

Individuals who have general questions that are not answered on the website can also **call 2-1-1 for assistance**. The information line is available 24 hours a day and has multilingual assistance and TDD/TTY access for those with a hearing impairment. The hotline is only intended to be used by individuals who are not experiencing symptoms but may have **general questions** related to COVID-19. Anyone experiencing symptoms is strongly urged to contact their medical provider to seek treatment.

CT DPH website - Including Behavioral Health resources for coping with stress and talking with children during infectious disease outbreaks: <https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Public-Health-Preparedness/Main-Page/2019-Novel-Coronavirus>

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please call the Health Department at (203) 891-4733.

Sincerely,

Amir Mohammad, MD, MPH
Director of Health