



DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND SUPPORT SERVICES  
CITY OF CHICAGO

Monday, March 9, 2020

Dear Delegate Agency Partner:

The health, safety, and well-being of all those we serve are amongst our highest priorities. Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) continue to work closely with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal, state and local partners to monitor and respond to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak.

As of yesterday, Sunday, March 8, 2020, there have been seven Illinois residents who have so far tested positive for COVID-19. The [latest case](#) was detected in a Chicago resident in his 60s who sought medical care. An investigation by CDPH is still underway but at this point this case has not been linked to any travel or to an already confirmed COVID-19 case. This case is not related to [the recently confirmed COVID-19 case involving an employee](#) at Jacqueline B. Vaughn Occupational High School in the Portage Park neighborhood. CDPH and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) are investigating that case thoroughly, reaching out to all students, faculty and staff, and monitoring the health of everyone who might have been exposed. CPS families, staff, students and others can continue to follow our website for the latest updates and recommendations.

Current information suggests that person-to-person spread will continue to occur and more cases might be identified in the United States, including in Chicago. CDPH's goal is to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in Chicago by detecting new cases quickly, minimizing transmission and developing guidance to prepare communities to respond. The virus is NOT currently spreading widely in the U.S. and the immediate health risk to the general public from the virus causing COVID-19 remains low both in the U.S. and in Chicago. However, there are steps individuals can take to help minimize the risk of COVID-19 spread:

- Practice everyday preventive actions such as performing frequent hand hygiene, washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (especially when

hands are visibly soiled) or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol; covering your cough and sneeze; avoiding ill people; and staying home when sick (except to seek medical care). These simple actions can prevent the spread of many illnesses, including COVID-19. For more information, see CDPH’s [Guidance for Individuals and Households](#).

We want to take a moment to reinforce best-practice preventative safety measures and reference best practice processes and procedures to keep our partners healthy and to share additional information available for specific types of organizations and communities:

- **Childcare facilities** should review their emergency operations plans. See CDPH’s [COVID-19 Guidance for Childcare Programs](#).
- **Youth-serving organizations**, especially those serving inside K12 institutions, should also review their emergency operations plans and should consider strategies for social distancing and online learning. See CDPH’s [COVID-19 Guidance for Schools and Institutions of Higher Education](#).
- **Non-profit organizations, businesses and other employers** should actively encourage all employees to stay home when sick, perform hand hygiene, and cover coughs and sneezes. Businesses should review their emergency operations plan, including identification of essential business functions, teleworking and flexible sick leave policies. For more information, see CDPH’s [COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#).
- **Community- and faith-based organizations** should review existing emergency operations plans, including strategies for social distancing and modifying large gatherings such as concerts and festivals. See CDPH’s [COVID-19 Guidance for Community- and Faith-based Organizations](#) and CDC’s [Interim Guidance: Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for COVID-19](#).
- **Healthcare providers** should continue to ask patients with fever and respiratory symptoms about their travel history. Refer to [CDC’s Guidance for Healthcare Professionals](#) for more information on screening and evaluating Persons Under Investigation.

Help reduce the spread of rumors. Let people know that viruses do not target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds. Being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19. Fight stigma and fear by supporting people who may be coming back to school or work after traveling internationally or completing a quarantine or isolation period for COVID-19.

The Chicago Department of Public Health will continue to monitor this situation closely in the days and weeks to come. Additional communications will be forthcoming if, and when, situations change. We will continue to take guidance from CDPH and communicate with all our partner organizations, as appropriate.

Most of us are bombarded with information from the internet, social media and news reports. It can be challenging to separate fact from fiction however the Chicago Department of Public Health is a source of reliable information and they are updating their website regularly. Visit their website at [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus) (CDPH). You can also check the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) (CDC).

Thank you.



Lisa Morrison Butler  
Commissioner



frequently  
asked  
QUESTIONS

### **What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people such as with MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV, and now with SARS-CoV-2.

Cases of COVID-19 have now been detected in 60 locations internationally, including in the U.S. Community spread in Washington resulted in [the first death in the United States](#) from COVID-19, as well as the first reported case of COVID-19 in a health care

worker, and the first potential outbreak in a long-term care facility. The latest situation summary updates are available on CDC's web page [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

### **What is the current risk assessment?**

- For the general American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.
- People in communities where ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19 has been reported are at elevated though still relatively low risk of exposure.
- Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Close contacts of persons with COVID-19 also are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Travelers returning from affected [international locations](#) where community spread is occurring also are at elevated risk of exposure.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Patients who get sick with COVID-19 develop mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing

CDC believes at this time that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure.

### **How does it spread?**

Although the virus that causes COVID-19 probably emerged from an animal source, it is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

### **How is it treated?**

There is no specific medicine to treat COVID-19 infection currently, though studies are underway. People sick with COVID-19 should receive supportive care from a health care professional. Supportive care means care to help relieve symptoms; for example, medicine to bring down fevers, or oxygen if a patient's oxygen level is low.

### **How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

Diagnosis occurs through laboratory testing of respiratory specimens and serum (blood). Some coronavirus strains cause the common cold and patients tested by their health care

provider may test positive for these types. The COVID-19 strain can **only** be detected at a public health laboratory.

### **How can I protect myself and my family?**

As with any respiratory virus, you can protect yourself and others by taking every day common sense actions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Remember that it is also flu season and CDPH recommends getting vaccinated, taking everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs, and taking flu antivirals if prescribed. For more information, see [www.chicago.gov/flu](http://www.chicago.gov/flu).

### **Do I need to wear a mask?**

CDPH does not recommend that people who are well wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

### **What can travelers do to protect themselves and others?**

CDPH strongly recommends avoiding travel to countries with **level 3 travel notices**, including layovers at airports, because there is widespread sustained transmission of COVID-19 in these countries and the risk of acquiring the virus is high. Because COVID-19 can be more serious in older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, people in these groups should also consider postponing travel to destinations with **level 2 travel notices**. CDPH does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to destinations with **level 1 travel notices** because the risk of COVID-19 is thought to be low. If you travel, take the following routine precautions:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.

- It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

The latest travel updates are available on CDC's [COVID-19 web page for travelers](#).

### **What if I recently traveled to an area affected by COVID-19 and got sick?**

If you were in a country with a COVID-19 outbreak and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, within 14 days after you left, you should:

- Seek medical advice – Call ahead before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room. Tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Not travel on public transportation while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus to others.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- If soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

### **What are the recommendations for healthcare providers?**

If you are a healthcare provider, be on the look-out for:

- People who recently traveled from China or another [affected area](#) and who have symptoms associated with COVID-19, and
- People who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 or pneumonia of unknown cause. (Consult the most recent definition for patients under investigation [PUIs].)

Report suspect COVID-19 cases to CDPH **immediately** (within 3 hours) by calling 312-746-SICK (7425) Monday through Friday during business hours or 311 during evenings, weekends, and holidays.

If you are a healthcare provider caring for a COVID-19 patient, please take care of yourself and follow recommended [infection control procedures](#). For more information, see CDC's [Interim Guidance for Healthcare Professionals](#).