

Coronavirus Preparations

by Jeffrey Haslett, Emergency Management Director

By now, everyone should be aware of the serious nature of the coronavirus, which has emerged as an epidemic in China and has the potential to become a global pandemic. The purpose of this alert is to provide a summary (from numerous federal, state & professional sources) to assist your preparation; should this very contagious virus in fact begin to spread widely throughout the U.S.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), there is currently no vaccine to prevent the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this disease. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases (such as the flu), including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- 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 using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- CDC *does not* recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.*
- Facemasks 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).*
- 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 an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

Additional protective steps recommended by other sources that could be of benefit include:

- Maintaining your immune system by getting plenty of rest and eating healthy nutritious foods, as well as drinking fluids. 'Your own immune system is always the best weapon.'
- Using supplements to include vitamins C & D3, magnesium, zinc and selenium.

- Using hand sanitizers and chlorine cleaners.
- Having additional food storage & supplies (i.e. toilet paper & paper towels).
- Making sure over-the-counter remedies are up to date and prescriptions are current and filled.
- Getting a flu shot.

Protective clothing includes N95 masks(*), goggles, medical gloves & gowns. CDC only recommends these items for health workers dealing with novel coronavirus patients, since these masks must be fitted properly in order to be effective. The N95 masks only filter 95% of particles sized 0.3 micrometers or larger. However, the coronavirus is smaller on average at about 0.1 micrometers in size, which means that some virus particles can still get through a N95 mask. Beards and hair also prevent the mask from working properly. And children require a size designed for children. People with breathing difficulties could find it hard to breath. Finally, ordinary surgical masks could be pretty useless.

Common symptoms of the coronavirus are similar to any other upper respiratory infection; including runny nose, coughing, sore throat, shortness of breath and sometimes a fever. In most cases, you won't know whether you have a coronavirus or a different cold-causing virus. The coronavirus can cause pneumonia, especially in older people, people with heart disease or people with weakened immune systems.

If you have any of the above symptoms (assuming the coronavirus starts to spread in the U.S. or if you have been traveling abroad) then immediately contact your doctor. You can get a lab test, which includes a nose, throat and maybe lung culture (as well as blood work).

Here are some links you can use to stay up to date on the status of this coronavirus in the U.S., and ways to stay prepared (if needed):

- VT Department of Health - <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>
- Center for Disease Control [CDC] - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>
- New York City Health Department - <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/novel-coronavirus-wuhan-factsheet.pdf>
- World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>