

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 23, 2020**

**Contact: Joint Information Center on COVID-19 for the Bay County at (850) 329-8496, [Heather.Kretzer@FLHealth.gov](mailto:Heather.Kretzer@FLHealth.gov)**

## **Bay County Issues Updates on COVID-19**

**PANAMA CITY, Fla.** — Bay County is responding to COVID-19. In an effort to keep Bay County residents and visitors safe and aware regarding the status of the virus, the Bay County Joint Information Center will issue daily updates. The Florida Department of Health has launched a [COVID-19 dashboard](#) that will be updated twice daily. Today, as of 5 p.m., there are **three cases** of COVID-19 in Bay County.

Last night, Bay County received confirmation of two new positive case of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus. The persons ill with the virus are a 74-year-old woman and a 55-year-old man. Both are Bay County residents. The 74-year-old woman is non-travel related. The 55-year-old man is travel-related including Florida and Puerto Rico.

The Florida Department of Health in Bay County (DOH-Bay) has completed its contact investigations. Individuals who will need to self-monitor for symptoms for a 14-day period have been identified. Contact investigations are a critical way for staff epidemiologists to track and prevent the spread of disease.

The total COVID-19 cases diagnosed in Bay County is now three. Residency of the cases includes; Youngstown, Lynn Haven, and Texas. Additional information about the cases is protected by the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPPA), Florida Statute 381.0031(6), and Florida Administrative Code Rules 64D-3.036 and 64D-3.041. DOH-Bay's goal is to always protect patient privacy.

As of March 15, 2020, a person who is exhibiting signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness and meets one or more of the following criteria meet CDC Criteria for testing for COVID-19.

- Any person who have had a close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case with fever or signs/symptoms e.g. cough and shortness of breath.
- Persons hospitalized with acute lower respiratory illness of unknown cause.
- History of travel to or from affected geographic areas with widespread community transmission with fever and cough or shortness of breath.
- History of international travel or a cruise with fever and cough or shortness of breath.
- 65 years or older with chronic health conditions with fever and cough or shortness of breath.
- Immunocompromised person with fever and cough or shortness of breath.

If you meet the above criteria, stop the spread. Call ahead to your doctor, the Florida Department of Health in Bay County at (850) 872-4455, or PanCare at (850) 215-4181 for screening. If testing is necessary, you will be given instructions on where, when, and how samples will be collected for testing.

The CDC offers a self-assessment tool. You can easily access the tool at [FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov](https://www.floridahealth.gov/covid-19).

For more information on what to do if you think you were exposed, visit [FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov/exposure](https://FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov/exposure).

To date as of 5 p.m., 54 people have been tested for COVID-19 in Bay County. Fifty-two residents and two non-Florida residents. 51 results are negative. Three are pending. **More information on a case-by-case basis can also be found [here](#).**

For more detail on Florida resident cases, please visit the live DOH Dashboard [here](#).

\* Florida residents that are diagnosed with COVID-19 and isolated out of state are not reflected on the Florida map.

\*\*Total cases overview includes positive cases in Florida residents and non-Florida residents tested in Florida.

## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN BAY COUNTY

- The Florida Department of Health in Bay County in cooperation with Bay County are proud to announce our new website, BayHealthCOVID19.com. Here you will be able to find these updates and additional information from around Bay County and from our JIC partners relating to COVID-19.
- The Florida Department of Health in Bay County is now on Nextdoor. Follow us at <https://nextdoor.com/agency/florida-department-of-health-10/?i=syltzbngnmfmqngksyky> for updates on COVID-19.
- Text bayhealth to 888-777 to receive alerts on your phone.
- The investigation into Bay County's first positive case of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus is complete. The person ill with the virus is a 47-year-old male non-Florida resident from Texas. The case has been ruled as domestic travel-related. Individuals who will need to self-monitor for symptoms for a 14-day period have been identified.
- DOH-Bay's Children's Dentistry Clinic is taking emergency appointments only and will be unable to provide elective procedures for the next three weeks.
- DOH-Bay's WIC service is now able to complete nutrition education through the phone and automatically push benefits, unless you need a recertification. The WIC clinic in Southport is closed until further notice.
- HIV evening testing is canceled until further notice. Testing during regular hours will continue.
- WIC's breastfeeding classes are canceled until further notice.
- All DOH-Bay events are cancelled until further notice including the March to Health 5K originally scheduled for March 28.

## BAY COUNTY

- The Bay County Code Enforcement Board meeting and the Special Magistrate hearing scheduled for April 2, 2020 has been canceled.
- The next meetings are currently scheduled for May 7, with the Special Magistrate hearing at 9 a.m. and the Code Board meeting at 3 p.m. in Room 1030 of the Bay County Government Center, located at 840 W. 11th St., Panama City.
- If you are a member of the public with concerns about Code Enforcement, please call (850) 248-8290.

- Food Truck Fridays at the Bay County Government Center will be suspended temporarily due to lack of interest. The event will resume once the COVID-19 situation relents.
- The business lobbies of the Bay County Board of County Commissioners as well as Bay County public libraries will close to the public, effective Tuesday, March 24, in an effort to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.
- Bay County Utilities provides a drop box at the front of the Utilities Department building, located at 3410 Transmitter Road and offers online payments at [www.baycountyfl.gov](http://www.baycountyfl.gov). Customers may also make a payment by calling (855) 973-2020. For more information about utility payments, please call (850) 248-5010.
- Applications for Bay Area Transportation and payments for the Bay Town Trolley and Bay Area Transportation are available at [www.baytowntrolley.org](http://www.baytowntrolley.org). Please call Transit at (850) 248-8161 for more information.
- Bay County Human Resources provides online recruitment options. Anyone interested in applying may visit [www.baycountyfl.gov](http://www.baycountyfl.gov) and click on External Job Opportunities to view posted vacancies. Human Resources may be reached at (850) 248-8201.
- All forms for Builders Services are available online at <https://www.baycountyfl.gov/154/Builders-Services>. Bay County licensed contractors with a Bay County trust account may email building permits to [permittingteam@baycountyfl.gov](mailto:permittingteam@baycountyfl.gov). Bay County Builders Services will provide a drop box for document delivery. For more information, please call (850) 248-8350.
- All forms for Planning and Zoning are online at <https://www.baycountyfl.gov/328/Forms>. Planning and Zoning encourages teleconferencing for meetings regarding development orders when possible. Please call (850) 248-8250 for more information.
- Concerns and questions regarding Bay County Code Enforcement may be emailed to [codeenforcement@baycountyfl.gov](mailto:codeenforcement@baycountyfl.gov) or call (850) 248-8290.
- Bay County Geographic Information Systems offers an online addressing application and can take payment over the phone. Visit <https://www.baycountyfl.gov/148/Address-Numbering> or call (850) 248-8170 for more information.
- For any county business that requires an in-person meeting, please contact the respective office directly to make an appointment.
- Bay County parks remain open to the public.
- Sandy beaches and beach access closed until further notice.
- The Bay County Board of County Commissioners has declared a state of emergency for Bay County as part of our response to COVID-19. The County's declaration allows us to access resources at the State and Federal level to support our community needs as well as more quickly fathering needed emergency supplies from vendors as we deal with this ongoing health crisis.
- Suspended group programming and events at the Cooperative Extension Office.
- Providing free transit passes to students and their caregivers to Bay District Schools feeding locations throughout the county.
- Suspended utility disconnections and late payment fees.
- Suspended cancellation of commercial accounts at the landfill.

## **BAY DISTRICT SCHOOLS**

- Implemented bus delivery of meals in addition to fixed sites available 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Monday-Friday.
- Distant learning finalized, information shared in news conference and through PeachJar.
- Call center available at 767-HELP. Open 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday - Friday.

- A schedule has been created for parents to pick-up students' items from the schools.
- Parents are also being asked to ensure their email address is updated in the Parent Portal on FOCUS so that they can receive the emails from PeachJar.
- All schools are closed through April 15 per Governor DeSantis. FAQs are available on Bay District's Facebook page. FSA/EOC testing is suspended for the rest of the year. BDS will be deploying distance learning programs beginning March 30. Please make sure you have an active email address uploaded to your child's Parent Portal account.
- Meal service will be available beginning March 23 for school-aged children. Children can access three pre-packaged meals per day, served to go only. Kids ride free on the trolley. Please see Bay District's Facebook page for details.

## **BAY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

- Bay County Sheriff Tommy Ford has provided deputies with equipment and established protocols needed to protect them and the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited to patrol deputies has been the distribution of additional gloves and N95 masks. Hand sanitizer and hand wipes have also been distributed. Information on COVID-19 has been provided while business travel and training schools such as conferences have been restricted.
- Telecommunicators have been given questions specific to the symptoms of COVID-19 to ask anyone who calls to get help for an ill person. Information gathered will help responding deputies to understand more clearly the situation they are about to enter and better help the ill person.
- Beginning Monday, March 23, 2020, the Bay County Sheriff's Office will begin an additional precautionary protocol by responding to certain, specific complaints of crime by having a deputy call back and complete an incident report by telephone. Not all complaint calls will have an incident report filled out by telephone. Just misdemeanor reports with the exception of crimes in progress, issues of public safety, and domestic violence. Examples of misdemeanor reports would be complaints of misdemeanor property crimes, identity theft, lost or stolen property, vehicle burglary, harassing phone calls, and criminal mischief.
- Certain felony reports will also be handled by a phone call, but ONLY felonies that DO NOT have a suspect present, require crime scene work, evidence collection, or immediate interviews. Examples of this type of felony would be credit card fraud, grand theft with no immediate follow-up required, identification theft, and telephone or other fraud. All violent felonies will have a deputy immediately dispatched to the scene.
- All citizens complaining of any crime who specifically request a deputy respond in person will have one sent to them. After the report is taken by phone, the case will be followed up by an investigator or an assigned zone deputy.
- Bay County Sheriff Tommy Ford will give ONE FREE 10-minute phone call to each inmate to use beginning today until next Thursday, March 26, 2020. Beginning next Thursday March 26, inmates will be allowed TWO FREE 10-minute phone calls to call loved ones. Inmates will have an additional week –until April 2, 2020—to make these two additional calls.
- Arrested three persons after the crowd violated alcohol ban and crowd size order.
- Sheriff Ford has enacted several procedural changes to protect employees and inmates from the spread of COVID-19. All other law enforcement agencies in Bay County that may bring individuals to the Jail for booking have been made aware of these changes and are fully cooperating. All volunteer programs have been suspended. Visitation is continuing due to the fact that it occurs via video with no inmate contact. Employees receive a health screening upon coming to work at the jail. Incoming inmates will also be screened. High risk inmates will be segregated from the general population for their safety.

- The Bay County Sheriff's Office is coordinating with other local agencies to ensure the safety of Bay County citizens and first responders. Sheriff Ford has taken steps to keep deputies safe as they continue to respond to calls for service by providing equipment they need such as gloves and masks.
- Sheriff Ford has also been in communication daily with Command Staff concerning the latest information about COVID-19 to keep all employees informed.
- BCSO telecommunicators have been given an additional list of questions to ask if there is a call for assistance involving a sick person, or a request for a Welfare Check on someone who has been ill, lives alone, and is not answering their door or phone. These questions will help deputies and EMS understand what situation they may face as they go to help.

#### **GULF COAST REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER**

- Due to the recent announcement of a positive COVID-19 case in Bay County, effective today Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center will be further restricting our visitor policy to one visitor per patient here at Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center. Emergency Room – 1 visitor per patient 24/7, no visitor under 18 years old. Med/Surg – no more than one visitor per patient from 6 am-8 pm, no visitor under 18 years old. We are asking all visitors to leave at 8 pm. ICU – no more than one visitor per patient from 6 am-8 pm, no visitor under 18 years old. We are permitting one visitor to stay overnight. Pediatrics- no more than one immediate family member visitor from 6 am-8 pm, no visitor under 18 years old. We are permitting one legal guardian to stay overnight. Labor and Delivery – Regular Visiting hours are from 6am-8pm. One support person may be at the bedside at one time, no visitor under 18 years old. PICU and NICU – no more than one immediate family member visitor from 6 am-8 pm, no visitor under 18 years old. We are permitting one legal guardian to stay overnight. All Outpatient Procedures - no more than one visitor per patient to assist/support patient for procedure, no visitor under 18 years old. Visitors will continue to be screened before entering the facility.
- Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is not a COVID-19 testing site. The hospital will swab patients who meet testing criteria and send samples to a lab for processing.

#### **ASCENSION SACRED HEART BAY**

- Only one visitor per patient is allowed in the building at a time. Family members or visitors can decide to rotate as they see fit, but only one in the building at a time.
- We have restricted entry for all patients and visitors to enter in and out of the Emergency Department entrance only. Staff and contractors enter in through the rear of the building or through our south tower entrance. This is so that proper screening can take place for everyone, including staff, who are screened daily upon entrance to the building.
- The cafeteria is no longer open to visitors unless they are here to see a patient.
- Ascension Sacred Heart Bay is not a COVID-19 testing site. The hospital will swab patients who meet testing criteria and send samples to a lab for processing.

#### **CITY OF PANAMA CITY**

- On March 24, 2020, the Panama City Mayor and Commissioners authorized the City Manager to eliminate or substantially reduce the cost of the City's garbage collection services to businesses (i.e. restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and fitness centers) that have closed or partially closed as a result of the Governor's Executive Orders.

- All convenience fees associated with online payments made to the City will be waived until further notice.
- All city services are available over the phone, by email or on the City's website, but the lobby of City Hall is closed to the public.
- Beginning on March 24, 2020, City Hall for the City of Panama City will be closed to the public through at least April 15, 2020. All services will remain available via telephone, through email and on the City's website, [www.pcgov.org](http://www.pcgov.org).
- Citizens who need to access city services can find a list of helpful links and contact information on the City's homepage under "News and Events." Posters with contact information are also posted at all entrances to City Hall.
- Declared a State of Emergency for the City of Panama City on March 18, 2020.
- Suspended all publicly-permitted events, facility reservations, sports and arts programming and informational meetings through at least April 15, 2020. Outdoor areas of the City's parks are currently open.

### **CITY OF PANAMA CITY BEACH**

- The City has shut down its building access to the public for City Hall, Police, Fire and Public Services. The police department is open for emergencies. We encourage all those needing City services to try to handle those on our website or call (850) 233-5100.
- Virtual City Council meetings will begin with the 9 a..m. Thursday, March 26 Council meeting. You can view via Facebook and website here:  
<http://www.pcbgov.com/city-council/city-council-meeting-live-webcast/-fsiteid-1>
- A third interaction option will be pushed out before the meeting. Instructions will be posted on Facebook and our website Tuesday or Wednesday. Council meetings will be open only to limited city staff and the media. Some of the council will attend remotely.

#### **EMPLOYEE SAFETY**

- The City began checking the temperature and asking screening questions to all employees as of 7 a.m. today. Employees with a fever or who have symptoms will not be allowed to stay at work. This will continue as long as necessary to protect employees, their families, and the public.
- Department heads have been asked to identify essential employees and establish telecommuting, flex schedule, and reassignment options, as needed, and identify lines of succession at least three deep, per essential position.
- The beach and beach accesses remain closed.
- Closed sandy beaches through Thursday, March 26 at Noon. The Commission will meet again Thursday, March 26 at 9 a.m. to consider extending the ordinance.
- Prohibited all public gatherings at City facilities/property with more than 10 people until May 1.
- Canceled City recreational sports leagues, tournaments, organized team practices, and special events until May 1.
- Closed Frank Brown Park Community Center and Lyndell Center for the next 60 days.
- Closed all bars and nightclubs for 30 days per Governor DeSantis.
- There will be no involuntary water utility shutoff and late payment delinquency action for 60 days.

### **CITY OF LYNN HAVEN**

All updates as of 3/23/20 can be viewed here:

<https://www.cityoflynnhaven.com/AlertCenter.aspx?AID=Updates-as-of-32320-20> and are as follows:

Lynn Haven, Fla.- On Tuesday, March 24, 2020, the City of Lynn Haven will close its facility lobbies to the public until further notice. In keeping with the direction from the governor and Florida Department of Health to limit potential exposure to COVID-19. Services provided will continue and the City staff will be made available by phone and online, but in person by appointment only.

Lobby closings include:

- City Hall/Customer Service Center/Utility Billing
- Building/Permitting (265-2121 extensions 134, 122 or 118) to schedule an inspection by email [buildingdepartment@cityoflynnhaven.com](mailto:buildingdepartment@cityoflynnhaven.com) or you may call the numbers above.
- Code Enforcement- For questions please [codeenforcement@cityoflynnhaven.com](mailto:codeenforcement@cityoflynnhaven.com)
- Fire Department - 911 for emergencies, non-emergencies (850-265-7335)
- Police Department – 911 for emergencies, non-emergencies (850-265-4111)
- Public Works – (850-265-5989)
- Public Utilities – (850-265-0087)

Customers are encouraged to submit utility payments via one of the following:

- U.S. Postal Service, 817 Ohio Avenue, Lynn Haven, FL 32444
- Dropbox (Located outside of the Customer Service Center)
- Online via the City's Website through a third-party vendor
- To pay credit card please call a Customer Service Representative at (850-265-2121)
- The City's Drive-thru located on the northside of the Customer Service Center is open from 7:30 am – 4:30 pm.

Additional Information:

- Utility Bills will continue as normal.
- No Shutoffs for March and April, HOWEVER, BILLS WILL STILL BE DUE. We encourage residents to make their payments if they can in order not to fall behind.
- The City is waving late fees for the months of March and April. Determination of extending this will be made in the future.
- The City will work with residents on a payment plan if necessary.

Commission Meetings

- Agendas are posted every Friday afternoon before each regular commission meeting.
- Tuesday, March 24, Commission meeting will be held face-to-face at 9 am.

Public Commission workshops have been canceled and will be rescheduled.

- During the pandemic, Special City Commission meetings may be necessary; agendas will be posted within 24 hours of the meeting.
- Future public meetings may be done by teleconference.
- We encourage you to watch all meetings by following the link on our website at [www.cityoflynnhaven.com](http://www.cityoflynnhaven.com)

## **NORTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM**

Beginning on Tuesday, March 24th, all Northwest Regional Library System locations will be closed to the public. Parker Public Library is fully CLOSED. All other locations will provide Curbside Pick-up Service for items that have been placed on hold. For more information, visit [www.nwrls.com](http://www.nwrls.com) or call the main branch at 850-522-2100.

#### Hour changes:

- Bay County Public Library – Monday through Saturday (9 a.m. - 5 pm).
- Panama City Beach – Regularly Scheduled Hours, Monday - Wednesday (9 a.m. - 6 p.m.), Thursday - Friday (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.), and Saturday (9 a.m. - 4 p.m.)
- Charles Whitehead Public Library in Wewahitchka – Monday & Friday (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.)  
Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library in Port St. Joe – Tuesday & Thursday (10 a.m. - 6 p.m.).
- Jimmy Weaver Memorial Library in Hosford – Regularly Scheduled Hours, Monday (9 a.m. - 7 p.m.), Tuesday (9 a.m. - 6 p.m.), Thursday (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.) and Saturday (9 a.m. - 12 p.m.)

#### UNITED WAY OF NORTHWEST FLORIDA

- Bay County Council on Aging continues to provide services
- Girls Inc. is providing online programming
- Junior League of Panama City Diaper Bank- Junior League of Panama City Diaper Bank is distributing diapers through Family Services Agency (850-785-1721) who will be distributing them Tuesday-Thursday from 9am-3pm. You can call ahead for an appointment or just walk in but they are limiting how many people can be inside their building at one time and everyone must stay 6 feet apart.
- Doorways of Northwest Florida Food Bank Information:
  - MON-FRI
    - Panama City Rescue Mission Dinner - 5 p.m.
    - Doorways of NWFL - 703 15th Street - 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. (Must be requested by a case manager)
    - St Andrews Baptist Church - 3010 W. 15th Street - 8:30 a.m. until the food is gone
  - MONDAY
    - Gulf Beach Baptist Church - 106 Hutchinson Blvd - 9 a.m. until noon
    - Catholic Charities - 3128 E. 11th Street - Call for an appointment
  - TUESDAY
    - St. Andrews Assembly of God - 2400 W. 15th Street - 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month - 10 a.m. until noon
    - Gulf Beach Presbyterian - 271 Highway 79 - 9 a.m. until 11:30 a.m.
    - Catholic Charities - 3128 E. 11th Street - Call for an appointment
    - A Hand Up - 6804 Bayou George Road - 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month - 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. - [www.ahandupintl.org/food-outreach](http://www.ahandupintl.org/food-outreach) to be updated by email about dates and availability
  - WEDNESDAY
    - Catholic Charities - 3128 E. 11th Street - Call for an appointment
    - Gulf Beach Baptist Church - 106 Hutchinson Blvd - 9 a.m. until noon
  - THURSDAY
    - Grace Episcopal - 9101 Panama City Beach Parkway - Dinner to go in the parking lot - 6-7 p.m.
    - Gulf Beach Presbyterian - 271 Highway 79 - 9 a.m. until 11 a.m.
    - Catholic Charities - 3128 E. 11th Street - Call for an appointment

- A Hand Up - 6804 Bayou George Road, 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month - 1 - 6 p.m. - Go to [www.ahandupintl.org/food-outreach](http://www.ahandupintl.org/food-outreach) to be updated by email about dates and availability
  - FRIDAY
    - First United Methodist Church - 903 E. 4th Street - 9 a.m. until noon
    - Gulf Beach Baptist Church - 106 Hutchinson Blvd - 9 a.m. until noon
- Catholic Charities Food Bank- Open Monday and Thursday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Beginning Thursday it will be by appointments only. They must call in (850-763-0475) and get a scheduled time. We are doing this in order to prevent a crowd and to protect both clients and staff.
- Healthy Start- Staff are doing virtual home visits and telephonic services. If there is a need for diapers and/or pack and plays safe places for families to have their babies sleep while in quarantine they can reach us through our FB page, web site or phone. FB- Healthy Start Coalition of Bay, Franklin and Gulf County Web is [ww.healthystartbfg.org](http://ww.healthystartbfg.org), and office number is 850-872-4130 ext 101.
- JUDOS Clothing Distribution- JUDOS and the House of Hope Outreach Ministry has a large clothing distribution at 3473 E. Hwy 98 Panama City, FL. PLEASE CONTACT Pastor Tammy Anderson 850-624-5073 or Rilla Davis 850-960-3384.
- Feeding the Gulf Coast encourages anyone seeking food assistance, wanting to find a way to get involved, or stay up to date about about COVID-19 hunger relief efforts in our area to visit <https://www.feedingthegulfcoast.org/learn-more/covid-19-response>. Utilizing the “Find Help” feature, one can input his/her address or zip code to find information about food pantries in the immediate area.

## PANCARE OF NORTHWEST FLORIDA

PanCare Health will begin conducting COVID-19 testing in Bay County as of Monday, March 23. Testing will only be performed on people who meet the current CDC criteria for testing. Call the PanCare COVID-19 response line at (850) 215-4181 Monday - Friday 9 am - 4 pm. Conduct an over the phone screening to ensure CDC criteria has been met. Upon qualifying for testing, you will be assigned a unique id number and given an appointment date and time. You must present this id number at your appointment with your photo id when you arrive at the off-site testing location.

### More Information on COVID-19

To find the most up-to-date information and guidance on COVID-19, please visit the Department of Health’s dedicated [COVID-19](#) website. For information and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), please visit the [CDC COVID-19 website](#). For more information about current travel advisories issued by the U.S. Department of State, please visit the [travel advisory website](#).

For any other questions related to COVID-19 in Florida, please contact the Department’s dedicated COVID-19 Call Center by calling **(866) 779-6121**. **The Call Center is available 24 hours per day**. Inquiries may also be emailed to **COVID-19@flhealth.gov**.

### What you Should Know

COVID-19 can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, including when an individual coughs or sneezes. These droplets may land on objects and surfaces. Other people may contract COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as many as 14 days following exposure. Most people recover from COVID-19 without needing special treatment. The elderly and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems and diabetes are more likely to develop serious illness.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. The Department recommends everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick;
- Staying home when you are sick and avoiding contact with persons in poor health;
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
- Covering your cough or sneezing into a tissue, then disposing of the tissue;
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, 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; and
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

The CDC does not recommend that asymptomatic, healthy people 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).

A person that experiences a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as fever, cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after travel from any other destination with community transmission should call ahead to their health care provider and local CHD and mention their recent travel or close contact.

If a person has had close contact with someone showing these symptoms who has recently traveled from this area or been in contact with a person with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19, he or she should call ahead to a health care professional and the CHD. The health care provider will work with the Department to determine if the person should be tested for COVID-19.

###