

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

PORTSMOUTH

Health Department



Charting a Course for Good Health

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Dear Community Partners,

The Portsmouth Health Department (PHD) continues to work with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to respond to the expanding global outbreak of COVID-19, caused by a new coronavirus. The outbreak first started in Wuhan, China but cases have been growing around the world including in the United States. **As of March 26, there are 460 cases of COVID-19 in Virginia, 13 deaths and 3 local cases in Portsmouth.**

PHD's public health response focuses on multiple areas—including daily coordination with VDH and CDC, internal PHD preparation, working with community partners (local governments, hospitals, etc.), and traveler monitoring. Local health departments coordinate disease surveillance for those who have been in contact with a known case of COVID-19. Based on the risk level the contact may be asked to self-quarantine, practice social distancing and/or self-monitor for symptoms or signs of COVID-19.

On a case-by-case basis, PHD works with local emergency departments, urgent care centers, private physician offices and other healthcare providers to evaluate people where there is concern about COVID-19. PHD has shared CDC criteria for a person to be tested for COVID-19 with local healthcare systems. Calls we receive regarding possible COVID-19 cases provide a good opportunity to discuss the situation and reinforce current testing criteria and infection control recommendations. If local healthcare providers have COVID-19 questions, we encourage them to contact us.

Because this is an emerging disease, some aspects of COVID-19 are not well understood at this time. Currently, there is not a COVID-19 vaccine or specific treatment other than supportive care. Scientists are working on developing a vaccine and treatment. Public health experts around the globe are working vigilantly to find out more information about the virus, its transmission, and the illness it causes. A lab test for the novel coronavirus has been developed, and CDC currently performs all testing. Testing for COVID-19 is available at public and private labs. Public health testing for COVID-19 is limited and based on risk such as vulnerable population status.

There is evidence of community spread in areas of Virginia's northern and central regions, as well as in the Peninsula. Community spread will expand to other areas of the Commonwealth in time, which is why all Virginians need to practice individual prevention and control measures. Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected. Cases of COVID-19 are surging in Virginia. We need everyone's help to stop the spread.



The Portsmouth Health Department received accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board by meeting national standards for high quality public health services, leadership, and accountability.

Here are steps everyone can take to respond to this emerging public health threat:

- It's currently flu and respiratory disease season. CDC, VDH and PHD recommend that everyone 6 months of age or older get a flu vaccine. It's not too late to do this. Flu and COVID-19 symptoms can appear similar.
- Practice good infection control measures at home and work. This includes washing your hands frequently, covering your cough (into a tissue or your sleeve), and staying home from work/school if you are ill.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill. Also, avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes.
- If you are considering travel, please see the CDC's travel website regarding coronavirus at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html for more information.
- VDH urges all Virginians should stay home and practice social distancing. If you have to go out, stay 6 feet away from others.
- Older adults and people with chronic medical conditions are particularly vulnerable and should limit exposure by staying home as much as possible. *Note: On March 23, CDC posted people over 65.
- Even if you're not at high risk for COVID-19, you can do your part to stop the spread by staying informed and taking action to protect others.

Thank you for your partnership as we continue to prepare and respond to this evolving public health threat. For patient-specific questions, we recommend you contact your healthcare provider. For general coronavirus questions, please visit the VDH coronavirus website www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus or call the VDH Regional Call Center at 757-683-2745.