

CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT URGES PREPARATION FOR COVID-19

Central District Health Department (CDHD) reminds the public of the need to prepare now for the expanding global outbreak of respiratory illness called COVID-19. Community spread is being detected in a growing number of countries, including in parts of the United States. As of March 5, 2020, there are 99 reported U.S. cases of COVID-19 from 13 states and New York City and no reported cases in our district. Positive COVID-10 tests alert both local and state health officials. The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the United States. Individual risk is dependent on exposure. "Public Health has been preparing for a viral outbreak for a long time. Our role is to keep our community informed and to coordinate actions among specific community groups to assure the least harmful impact possible."

"We are in communication with NE DHHS and the CDC several times daily to assure our local messages and actions are timely, accurate and effective. This enables us to provide guidance to specific groups in our community in preparation for the first case here in Central Nebraska," states Anderson. "In addition to face-to-face meetings, we send updated messages to specific groups including schools, clinics, hospitals, long term care facilities, and businesses on steps each should take to be prepared. A meeting for health care providers, hospitals and public health is planned for the coming week. This situation is continuously evolving so what we know today is almost certain to change tomorrow. We have linked our website cdhd.ne.gov to the CDC Covid-19 website so that people can check for daily updates."

Under current circumstances, certain people will have an increased risk of infection. For example, 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.

Our community can take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. At this time, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19 and no medications approved to treat it. Our community has a key role to play in staying healthy and getting ready for COVID-19. **Practice everyday preventive actions now:**

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles) using a regular household detergent and water.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- If you develop respiratory symptoms, call the clinic before you go so they can prepare for your arrival which may include wearing a mask or using an alternate entrance.
- 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.
- Stay up to date on COVID-19 by checking cdhd.ne.gov regularly.