

Date: 2nd March, 2020

From: Teresa Anderson, Health Director

To: Long Term Care and Residential Facilities in Hall, Hamilton and Merrick Counties

Re: Covid-19 (previously known as novel Corona virus):

Over the past several weeks, we have been carefully monitoring the activity of Covid-19 (previously called the 'novel Coronavirus-19' or '2019-nCoV'). You have probably seen this in the quarantine and isolation of those who have either been exposed to or who have symptoms of Covid-19. Currently, we are not aware of any Covid-19 virus in our district. However, the CDC tells us that it is not a question or "if" but rather "when" the Covid-19 virus will be spread through communities in the United States. This virus is new, and we will learn much more about it over time. We think it is wise for us all to prepare now in order to better manage the changes we may need to make in our daily activities in the future. We will not have a vaccine for Covid-19 for at least a year, but there are measures we can take now.

The recent cases of Covid-19 in a long-term care facility in Washington State are obviously very concerning given the vulnerability of an elderly and/or immune-compromised population. Our goal now is to keep Covid-19 out of a long-term care facility. Even when there is a case, we can limit the spread by close attention to organizational policies on hygiene, cleaning, activities, or what is referred to as non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI).

Long term care and residential facilities have plans in place for dealing with infectious diseases like influenza as well as plans for how they will manage staffing shortages. CDHD is recommending that all facilities in the area take time now to revisit these plans and assess how you may improve them in preparation for, and response to Covid-19.

Additional steps in preparation include the following:

- Make sure your emergency contact lists are up to date
- Plan for what you would do if you were closed to visitors for a week or longer in terms of continuing to provide services.
 - Can you provide family contact by other means like video, skype, or messenger etc.?
Can some of the activities be curtailed or done remotely to limit resident to resident contact?
 - If visits take place, enforce strict handwashing for the visitors and restrict those who may be sick from coming into the facility. This should include posting "NO VISITOR" signs at the entrance.
- Revisit your plans for cleaning rooms, contact surfaces especially in communal areas for residents and staff including assuring that you have appropriate cleaning solutions and wipes, sprays etc. on hand.
 - Keep staff, residents, and their families informed as to what actions you are taking.
 - Encourage a strong emphasis on hand washing by staff and residents as often as possible during activities, bathroom, eating, etc. and make sure hand sanitizer is available.

- Check and enforce your inter-facility transfer infection protocols.
- Continue to follow information and advice from CDHD
- Encourage staff to stay at home if sick (check your policies around absenteeism to see that they support this)
- Check your stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves, masks, and eyewear. PPE should be used appropriately as needed, but not inappropriately as this wastes PPE. New supplies of PPE are currently limited so please conserve what you have.

Regularly washing hands and ‘basic’ hygiene measures like coughing into an elbow continue to be the most effective measures to prevent the spread of viruses and other germs. Preparation now can aid in delaying the spread of the virus and can reduce the impact of the virus. Each facility will need to consider taking steps that are best suited in reducing the impact of Covid-19. We continue to prepare for the spread of COVID-19 in our community, while remaining hopeful.

Sources of further information on non-pharmaceutical interventions for long-term care facilities

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html>

Long Term Care Facility Respiratory Outbreak Resources Checklist

<https://www.cdc.gov/longtermcare/pdfs/LTC-Resp-OutbreakResources-P.pdf>

Interfacility transfer infection control checklist

<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/toolkits/Interfacility-IC-Transfer-Form-508.pdf>