

NEWS RELEASE

Panhandle

Public Health District

March 6, 2020

For immediate release.

For more information, contact:

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Unified Command is working with partners to prepare for possible community spread in the panhandle

We are responding to a respiratory disease outbreak caused by a novel coronavirus first detected in China and which has now been detected in almost 70 locations internationally, including in the United States.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people. What is important to remember is that the common coronaviruses are not the same as the novel (new) coronavirus known as COVID-19.

The first case of COVID-19 in Nebraska was confirmed in Omaha on March 6; it is not a case of community spread. Community spread means the spread of an illness for which the source of infection is unknown.

There are no cases of COVID-19 in the Panhandle, and we do not see community spread in much of the United States, including Nebraska. The immediate risk from COVID-19 is low for Panhandle residents, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time. Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 and those who have close contacts of persons with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.

If you have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or have recently traveled to an area with ongoing spread, please self-report by calling public health (308-262-5764). If you become ill, call public health before seeking health care so that you can receive proper treatment.

PPHD is contracted by DHHS to maintain a Pandemic Influenza Plan for all 12 counties to reduce morbidity, mortality, and the social and economic impact of pandemic influenza in the panhandle. A pandemic is a public health emergency, and PPHD is committed to securing the health and safety of the population it serves. The plan describes a coordinated strategy to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

The plan is dynamic and is continually updated to reflect new developments in the understanding of the disease agent, its spread, treatment, and prevention. It will

incorporate changes in response roles and improvements in response capabilities developed through ongoing planning efforts.

Unified Command consisting of Region 21, 22, and 23 Emergency Management and Public Health (Panhandle Public Health District and Scotts Bluff County Health Department) and was activated on February 28, and a joint information center has been activated to provide consistent communication.

We have been meeting with hospital staff weekly for the past month to provide updates, sending out updates and guidance in a timely manner, and reaching out to assist partners in their planning efforts. Partners include hospitals, clinics, schools, childcare, law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, home visitation, businesses, faith-based communities, behavioral health, Area Office of Aging, and the partner lists continue to grow each day.

Partners play an essential role in slowing the spread of the disease. Through these partnerships and collaboration, we are working to align plans to help protect the whole community.

We would like to invite you to join in the planning efforts. We are hosting a couple of virtual meetings on March 10.

- Community and Faith-Based Leaders at 11a, contact tprochazka@pphd.org for the link.
- Worksites and Employers at 12p, contact jdavies@pphd.org for the link.

We are also offering virtually meetings weekly for schools and childcare providers. If you need assistance in planning, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We are the credible and reliable source for information and provide partners with updated guidance as it becomes available; all our information is directly from the CDC. The team continues to work together to stay updated on the rapidly changing situation and provide updated information as it becomes available. We encourage you to follow us on Facebook.

To learn more about COVID-19, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/covid19>.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website www.pphd.org.