



Rhode Island Department of Health
3 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908 | www.health.ri.gov

For: Immediate release

Date: March 1, 2020

Contact: [Joseph Wendelken](mailto:Joseph.Wendelken@health.ri.gov) (401-378-0704)

First Presumptive Positive Case of COVID-19 Identified at RIDOH's State Health Laboratories

Media availability scheduled for Governor and Director of Health

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is announcing the state's first presumptive positive case of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The person is in their 40s and had traveled to Italy in mid-February. RIDOH is coordinating closely with the hospital where this person is currently being treated and all infection control protocols are being followed.

Governor Gina M. Raimondo and Director of Health Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH, will be available to answer questions today, March 1st, at a media availability.

"The Rhode Island Department of Health has been preparing for weeks to ensure that we have a structure in place to, to the best of our ability, limit or prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Rhode Island. We fully anticipated having a first case of COVID-19," said Dr. Alexander-Scott. "We are not seeing widespread community transmission in Rhode Island, and the general level of risk for Rhode Islanders is still low. However, everyone in Rhode Island has a role to play in helping us prevent the spread of viruses, just like the flu. It is very important that people wash their hands regularly, cover their coughs and sneezes, and stay home if they are sick."

Outreach to the people who were in direct contact with this individual has already begun, with extensive efforts underway to ensure that they undergo a period of 14 days of self-monitoring for symptoms at home with public health supervision (quarantine). As long as anyone exposed to the individual does not have symptoms outside of their home setting, the virus cannot spread to other people in the community. This individual's immediate family members have been self-quarantining at home since it was determined that, based on this person's travel history and symptoms, the individual met the criteria to be evaluated for COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is managing contact tracing for people on this person's return flight to the United States.

This individual had limited travel in Rhode Island since returning from Italy. This person had not returned to their place of work since returning from Italy.

In the past few weeks, RIDOH's State Health Laboratories worked to develop the capacity to perform testing for COVID-19 virus. In response to an urgent need, the State Health Laboratories expedited the final steps of implementation to run the test that identified this first case of COVID-19 in Rhode Island this weekend. Previously, all testing for COVID-19 was done at CDC. At this time, each presumptive positive test result must still be confirmed by the CDC Laboratories. This might change in the coming days.

Because human coronaviruses most commonly spread through respiratory droplets, Rhode Islanders are reminded to take the same measures that healthcare providers recommend annually to prevent the spread of the flu and other viruses.

- Get your flu shot, and make sure the people around you do the same.
- Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Flu is spread through coughing or sneezing on other people or into your hands. Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent others from getting sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.

The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected.

If you have recently traveled from an area with [widespread or ongoing community spread](#) of COVID-19 and you have symptoms of the disease (fever, cough, shortness of breath) reach out to your healthcare provider and call ahead before going to a healthcare facility. The healthcare provider or facility will work closely with RIDOH.

There have been more than 60 U.S. cases of COVID-19 confirmed. Globally, more than 80,000 cases have been confirmed. CDC reported the first U.S. fatality on February 29th.

RIDOH continues to be notified by the federal government of asymptomatic travelers who are coming to Rhode Island after having been in China in the previous 14 days. These people are doing self-monitoring for symptoms for 14 days and are limiting their

movement locally. (Passengers who have symptoms or who are coming from Hubei Province are not coming to Rhode Island. They are being quarantined domestically near the international airport where they landed.)

RIDOH is coordinating with other State agencies and community organizations to support anyone doing self-quarantining to ensure that people who are remaining at home have the support services they need. This includes support with everyday needs, such as prescriptions and groceries. The organizations that have offered support include agencies throughout the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), the Rhode Island Food Bank, the American Red Cross, and other members of Rhode Island's Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD).

The additional preparedness steps that RIDOH has taken include:

- Establishing an Incident Command System response, which is how RIDOH and other State agencies organize to prepare for (or respond to) an urgent situation that requires extensive coordination. It includes staff from the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA), the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), and Rhode Island Commerce. It also includes staff from RIDOH's State Health Laboratories, Center for Acute Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response, and Center for Public Health Communication, among other areas of RIDOH.
- Regularly communicating with RIDOH's Infectious Disease Epidemiology Advisory Committee (IDEAC) to track any clinical and epidemiological developments related to COVID-19. (IDEAC is a group of infectious disease physicians throughout Rhode Island that provides guidance to RIDOH leadership on emerging infectious disease matters.)
- Maintaining a robust system to receive and follow up on illness reports from Rhode Island healthcare providers.
- Regularly sending to local healthcare providers summaries of the national situation, criteria to guide evaluation of patients, and guidance on specimen collection, testing, and reporting.
- Coordinating closely with healthcare facilities and emergency medical services (EMS) providers to ensure their preparedness.
- Communicating regularly to community partners, such as schools, faith leaders, and municipal officials.

More information about COVID-19 is available in multiple languages at health.ri.gov/covid.

###

- For general health questions, contact the Health Information Line: 401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711 or visit www.health.ri.gov
- [View previous RIDOH press releases and announcements](#)
- [Like us on Facebook](#)
- [Follow us on Twitter - @RIHEALTH](#)
- [Order printed material](#)