



TOWN OF WELLESLEY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY REGARDING CORONAVIRUS

DATE: February 28, 2020

FROM: Leonard Izzo, Director, Wellesley Health Department

RE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update and Local Efforts

I am writing to you today to provide the latest update regarding a new Coronavirus called COVID-19, first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, as well as to highlight the plans in place in our community to address any local implications of this virus.

Wellesley Health Department and the Town of Wellesley have been preparing for emerging infectious diseases for many years. While COVID-19 is a new virus, the coordination, communication efforts, and infrastructure around our public health preparedness is firmly in place.

To date, there has been one confirmed case (from February 1, 2020) of COVID-19 in the state. According to the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](http://www.mass.gov/mdph) (MDPH), the risk to the public from COVID-19 remains low. Wellesley Health Department (WHD) is receiving regular updates from MDPH and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov) (CDC) on this rapidly evolving situation. The department is in regular contact with key town officials and local hospitals to discuss status reports, directives and messaging for the community. In addition, WHD is participating in webinars hosted by MDPH, which offer updates and guidance for local health departments, school officials and other stakeholders in the communities at-large.

WHD is asking public and private businesses to help “spread” helpful hygiene and sanitization measures, by providing hand sanitizer, handi-wipes and signage to reinforce prevention strategies, including reminding sick employees to stay home. WHD inspectors/environmental health specialists will be contacting food establishments and providers to reinforce these messages.

Town of Wellesley Plan to Address COVID-19

The Town of Wellesley has an Emergency Preparedness (EP) plan in place that encompasses assessment and response to likely public health threats (including pandemics) and other all-hazard emergencies that might affect the community.

This plan outlines the key stakeholders that would be consulted with to form action plans and work collaboratively with including:

Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) comprised of the Assistant Fire Chief, and the Health Department Director (co-chairs); representatives from the Board of Selectmen, Town Executive Director, Police, Fire, Health Department, Schools (including the colleges), Council on Aging, DPW, Facilities, Newton-Wellesley Hospital, Red Cross and others as needed.

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) and Other Volunteers – Wellesley residents with medical expertise, as well as those with non-medical experience, who assist WHD at flu clinics and other public health and wellness events. These volunteers are trained (using the national Incident Command System) in their likely roles in a public health emergency. They were an integral part of the response to the H1N1 flu pandemic that affected the community in 2009-2010. If COVID-19 adversely affects Wellesley in the near future, MRC and other volunteers may again be deployed to assist WHD address the virus.

The Town is continuing to monitor this situation, prepare information to keep Wellesley residents informed, and provide any response that may be needed.

Emergency Preparedness Coalitions

Wellesley Health Department is part of a regional 60 town and community emergency preparedness coalition called Region 4AB, that works collaboratively to implement CDC, and MDPH Emergency Preparedness initiatives, as well as other regional and local public health efforts.

The Department is also part of a sub-regional emergency preparedness coalition called Norfolk County 8 (NC8), comprised of Health Departments in Canton, Dedham, Milton, Needham, Norwood, Walpole, Wellesley, and Westwood. NC8 works together on various public health planning and emergency preparedness efforts. They regularly participate in trainings and drills for staff and Medical Reserve Corps volunteers in their communities.

What Can You Do?

There are steps you can take to avoid coming into contact with viruses such as COVID-19 and Influenza (which is rampant at this time). WHD still has a supply of flu vaccine, and it's not too late to get your shot.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.
 - CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
 - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is

- also crucial for [health workers](#) and [people who are taking care of someone in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).
- 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 an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

For information about handwashing, see [CDC's Handwashing](#) website

For information specific to healthcare, see [CDC's Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#)

These are everyday habits that can help prevent the spread of several viruses. CDC does have [specific guidance for travelers](#).

Resources for More Information

Wellesley Health Department website: <https://wellesleyma.gov/1432/Disease-Virus-and-Flu>

Wellesley Public Schools: <https://wellesleyps.org/>

MA Department of Public Health <https://www.mass.gov/guides/information-on-the-outbreak-of-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Please refer to the Town of Wellesley website and these resources for continued updates on the Coronavirus.