

10 Frequently Asked Questions About Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Because the situation continues to evolve, this document will be regularly updated. The information below reflects the situation as of 03/02/2020.

Q: Are there any confirmed cases in Louisiana?

A: As of 03/02/20, there are no confirmed cases in Louisiana.

Q: What is the current situation?

A: While the CDC now expect community spread in some parts of the U.S., the immediate threat to the U.S. remains low. We are not seeing the same level of spread other countries are seeing. That said, it is important to be prepared, which is what we have been doing since the outbreak in mainland China.

Q: What is the protocol in place for responding to a pandemic like COVID-19?

A: COVID-19 in many ways behaves similarly to influenza. The CDC recommends using the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness plan as our model for the response because COVID-19 in many ways behaves similarly to influenza. The Louisiana Department of Health has been working on our Pandemic Preparedness Plan for the last 15 years, and we have been preparing for COVID-19 since early January 2020. The Governor directed the formation of a COVID-19 Task Force with representation from state agencies and federal partners key to preparing for a COVID-19 outbreak to guide updating pandemic flu and continuity of operations planning documents and advise the Unified Command Group.

Q: What have you been doing as far as monitoring people who may have been exposed?

A: Our first priority was to ensure we were monitoring any travelers who returned to Louisiana from visiting China, where many of the cases have occurred, and especially Wuhan, the city that experienced the largest outbreak. We touch base with those travelers each day and ask about their symptoms during a 14-day period of observation. We are also ensuring that travelers know the destinations where non-essential travel should be avoided.

Q: Do we have the capability to test?

A: We do have the capability to test for COVID-19 in-state. Providers should contact the Office of Public Health Division's Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program (IDEpi). Testing is prioritized for individuals that meet clinical and risk criteria.

Q: What's the next major step in the Department's plan for responding to an outbreak?

A: Mirroring the federal government's response, we are moving from a 'containment' approach in which we focused on restricting travel from the outbreak area in Wuhan city and Hubei province in China and monitoring returning travelers from other parts of China, to a 'mitigation' approach in which we anticipate and plan for person-to-person transmission in the community somewhere in the United States and ensure state and local governments, health care providers, schools, businesses, and community members are adequately prepared to take action to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We don't want people to be alarmed, but we do want them to be prepared. We also want businesses and health care facilities to be prepared to make sure people are safe and protected so we can avoid an unnecessary spread, including planning now for actions that can be taken to avoid the spread of infections such as mandatory teleworking and canceling unnecessary large gatherings.

Q: What are you doing to make sure hospitals are prepared?

A: LDH has been working with Louisiana Hospital Association (LHA) and the ESF8 Network to prepare hospitals for an outbreak and ensure they have the proper supplies needed as well as protocols are in place for anyone treated who tests positive. We haven't had any indication that hospitals don't have what they need on the supply side.

Q: Is it safe to receive a package from any area where COVID-19 has been reported?

A: Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, traveled, and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also low.

Q: Are you in regular contact with the federal government?

A: Yes. We are in very regular contact with the CDC and HHS; we're currently averaging several calls per week just with the CDC. In addition we have standing calls across state health departments and a standing call internally in Louisiana. This is all very important so that we all have the latest data, are on the same page, and can adapt our plans as conditions change.

Q: Should individuals and families have a plan if an outbreak occurs?

There are actions we all can take as individuals to be prepared for COVID-19. The same actions you take to prevent the spread of flu put you in a good position for any respiratory illness - cover your cough, wash your hands (especially after being in public spaces, shaking hands), stay home if you are sick, and get your flu shot! Individuals and families should also monitor the CDC COVID-19 website for updated travel advisories before making plans to travel internationally.