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LPCA Releases Statement on COVID-19: Health Center Preparation & Response

As you have most certainly heard in the news, health officials around the globe are racing to contain the spread of a new influenza-like coronavirus labeled COVID-19. The virus, originating in Wuhan, China, has now spread to dozens of countries, including Japan, South Korea, Iran, Italy, and now the United States. At this point, more than 92,000 people around the world have been sickened by COVID-19 since the start of January.

Earlier this week, we learned that the virus has spread in small pockets within the United States. **At this time, there are no confirmed COVID-19 cases in Louisiana.** Some Louisianans traveling from affected countries have been asked to isolate themselves at home, but none have shown symptoms of the virus. Governor John Bel Edwards and state health officials agree that there will be cases, it is simply a matter of “when” not “if.”

While COVID-19 is most certainly a cause for concern, there is no need to panic. Now is the time to exercise caution, be prepared, and most importantly – educate and inform. As our state’s largest network of safety-net primary care providers, Louisiana’s Community Health Centers have a critical role to play in the nationwide response. With over 285 individual sites all across the state, we are uniquely positioned to assist patients when natural disasters and public health emergencies strike our communities.

The most important thing our Community Health Centers can do is educate and inform patients. There is a lot of misinformation about COVID-19. Our patients should not panic. At this time, chances of infection from COVID-19 are still low. Community Health Center patients and staff members should take the same precautions as you would for any other influenza season, including:

- Getting a flu shot,
- Staying home when sick,
- Covering coughs and sneezes,
- Washing hands frequently, and
- Routinely cleaning frequently touched surfaces.

CDC officials urge the public to refrain from purchasing facemasks unless they are sick or are taking care of someone who is infected.

Fortunately, our State Public Health Laboratory has validated the testing for COVID-19 and now has the ability to test patients within Louisiana. This will shorten the time to diagnosis or rule-out cases. Clinicians who suspect COVID-19 in a patient should call 1-800-256-2748 to determine whether a specimen should be collected and submitted for testing. Healthcare providers should obtain a detailed travel history for all patients being evaluated with fever and acute respiratory illness.

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The Louisiana Primary Care Association and Louisiana's Community Health Centers are working closely with the Louisiana Department of Health and the CDC. In Louisiana, the professionals who work in our state's Office of Public Health have been training for years in order to respond to incidents such as this one. We have the utmost confidence in our state and national partners.

Finally, please tune in to "[Prepare Not Panic: COVID-19 CDC Update and the Health Center Response](#)" webinar on Friday, March 6 at 12pm CT. This webinar is being hosted by the National Association of Community Health Centers and will provide information on how health centers can continue to prepare an organized response to COVID-19, including:

- sharing clinical protocols nationwide
- building systems in partnership with federal, state authorities, local public health departments, and community stakeholders to boost the health center response strategy.

In the meantime, Louisiana's Community Health Centers are encouraged to review the follow resources:

[LDH: 10 Frequently Asked Questions About Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Website](#)

[Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives](#)

[CDC: Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#)

The Louisiana Primary Care Association, in partnership with the National Association of Community Health Centers, and local, state, and national public health agencies, will continue to monitor this situation closely and provide timely updates directly to Louisiana's Community Health Centers.

About the Louisiana Primary Care Association

The Louisiana Primary Care Association (LPCA) represents 39 federally funded, private, non-profit and public Community Health Centers (and 3 Look-Alikes) across Louisiana that serve over 444,000 patients annually. LPCA promotes community-based health services through advocacy, education, and collaboration with community partners. Our goal is to ensure that every Louisianan has access to affordable, quality, primary care services. For more information, visit www.LPCA.net.