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Contact: Crystal Staley
502-564-2611
502-545-3714

Anya Weber
502-564-3703 ext. 3800

Governor Beshear, Kentucky Health Officials Announce Efforts to Prevent 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

No cases in the state; Kentuckians provided with tips on how to stay well

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Feb. 27, 2020) – Governor Andy Beshear was joined by officials from the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH), within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), to announce that Kentucky continues to closely monitor the international situation concerning the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Gov. Beshear emphasized that though there are currently no COVID-19 cases in the state, public health officials have been monitoring individuals who meet certain criteria and are also preparing for the possibility of the virus spreading within the Commonwealth.

"It's important for the public to know that even though Kentuckians are at low risk for this virus, our state and local health experts have been working hard to ensure the public is educated and that reports of patients that meet criteria for COVID-19 are being properly tested and treated to reduce potential harm," Gov. Beshear said. "The best advice for Kentuckians to follow is not new advice – get your flu shot, stay home if you are not feeling well and practice good hygiene by washing your hands thoroughly."

This week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advised that the United States should prepare for the possibility of COVID-19 spreading within local communities.

CHFS Acting Secretary Eric Friedlander said that his team has developed several resources to support local health departments, clinicians and the general public, including a Kentucky-specific website, kycovid19.ky.gov.

"While there is a low immediate health risk, we know that because Kentucky is part of the global health community, we may see positive cases here," he said. "I am proud that our local and state health experts are prepared to respond quickly, calmly and thoroughly."

Dr. Steven Stack, Department of Public Health (DPH) commissioner, said that federal guidelines emphasize rapid response for monitoring individuals who develop symptoms and are identified as "at risk."

"The Kentucky Department for Public Health is working closely with the CDC and local partners to address the COVID-19 response and remains vigilant with active surveillance measures in place," he said. "This virus is a serious public health concern, however the risk to the general public at this time in Kentucky remains low and we have no confirmed cases and no persons under investigation. If the situation changes and we start seeing person-to-person transmission in Kentucky, we have plans in place to help reduce the impact of diseases like novel coronavirus."

"We understand that some people are worried about this virus and how it may impact Kentuckians," Dr. Stack said. "We are carefully monitoring the evolving situation and taking necessary precautions. Kentucky has a strong disease surveillance system in place that includes partnerships with hospital and clinic systems as well as local health departments and we are committed to this mission of protecting the health and safety of all Kentuckians."

Symptoms of COVID-19 may include fever, cough or shortness of breath.

Individuals who are experiencing symptoms and may have recently traveled to China and other countries currently affected by COVID-19, or have been in contact with someone who has traveled to affected areas should first contact their local health department.

As with any virus, especially during the flu season, there are a number of steps you can take to protect your health and those around you:

- Get a flu shot from your Local Health Department or your family provider.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Click here to watch videos on proper handwashing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and then properly dispose of.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

DPH is working closely with clinicians to make sure providers are aware of and informed about the illness. In addition, DPH wants to ensure providers there is a process in place to determine

whether testing is warranted, including consulting with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as needed.

- DPH is contacting and monitoring anyone they are aware of who has travelled in the last 14 days from China, the primary country of concern, to assess if they develop any symptoms.

- To reduce potential risk, we have asked these travelers to self-isolate, to avoid public gatherings and report their temperatures and any symptoms daily.

- We have monitored over 100 people up to this point, and the majority of these travelers have already passed the 14-day monitoring period. All but one have been illness-free, and that person tested negative for COVID-19.

- We are reminding the public through all our means of communication and network of local health departments to follow the general respiratory illness and flu prevention tips that are crucial in preventing viral exposure and the spread of germs.

COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China and continues to expand to other countries. Chinese health officials have reported more than 78,100 COVID-19 infections in China, with the virus reportedly spreading from person-to-person in parts of that country. Infections with COVID-19, most of them associated with travel from Wuhan, also are being reported in a growing number of international locations, including the U.S. Some person-to-person spread of this virus outside China has been detected. The U.S. reported the first confirmed instance of person-to-person spread with this virus on January 30, 2020. To date there have been 2,718 deaths worldwide from the virus. The current cases of infection in the U.S. is available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html.

The CDC has several fact sheets to educate the public as information changes:

- What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf

- What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf

- CDC Protects and Prepares Communities https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/infographic-cdc-protects-508.pdf

For more information on COVID-19 visit https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.