



March 4, 2020

## **Business Briefing on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**

While the immediate health risk for coronavirus disease for Delawareans and most Americans remains low, our Division of Public Health (DPH) continues to prepare for community spread of the virus. DPH is working with many partners, including the Governor's office, health care systems, EMS, DEMA, state, local and federal agencies, schools, legislators and the business community.

In collaboration with our partners and the general public, our efforts are now focused on mitigating the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 when confirmed cases do occur in our state. As Division of Public Health Director Dr. Rattay said this week at a press conference, "We must prepare to detect the introduction of the virus in Delaware and to reduce its potential spread and impact." You can get additional information in three ways:

- Find updates, FAQs and downloadable materials at **DPH's coronavirus webpage: [de.gov/coronavirus](https://de.gov/coronavirus)**
- Starting Wednesday morning, the **Division of Public Health opened a public call center at 1-866-408-1899**. For now, the call center will be staffed from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and have a recorded message after-hours.
- DPH also will receive **public email inquiries and questions at [dphcall@delaware.gov](mailto:dphcall@delaware.gov)**

### **Steps Businesses Should Take Now**

We know that if Delaware does have confirmed cases of coronavirus disease – also known as COVID-19 – it will have an impact on businesses and their employees. If employers haven't already, now is the time to:

- Review plans to operate with adaptations such as telework and flexible sick leave policies that permit employees to stay home and care for a sick family member.
- Review other contingency or emergency operations plans.
- Communicate policies and plans with employees.
- Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff are absent.
- Have a plan in place if an employee does get sick at the workplace.
- Consider not requiring a health care provider's note for employees with an acute respiratory illness.



Most importantly, in the event of an outbreak locally, we will need employers to stress to employees that they not come to work when they are sick. We recognize that is a difficult ask – especially for small businesses – and for employees whose paychecks depend on every hour that they do work. But limiting public interactions of people who are sick will be an important mitigation strategy if community spread does occur in Delaware.

To date, there have been **no cases of COVID-19 reported in Delaware**. The Division of Public Health's Lab in Smyrna does have to the ability to test for coronavirus disease, and it has tested its first cases this week. All have been negative. Our Public Health officials know this is a rapidly evolving situation in the U.S. and across the world, and that recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are subject to frequent change.

### **What Employers Can Urge Employees to Do to Minimize the Spread of Illness**

Delaware is experiencing a particularly serious flu season, with more than 5,500 lab-confirmed cases and 11 deaths statewide. In addition to encouraging Delawareans to get their flu shot, the Division of Public Health recommends these everyday measures to prevent the spread of all germs, which also would slow the spread of coronavirus disease:

- Cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hand. If you use a tissue, dispose of it right away.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water, including the backs of your hands and under your nails. Or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your face, eyes or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean surfaces at work, home or school that you use often.
- Stay home when you are sick and avoid being around well people.
- If you are healthy, the CDC does not recommend buying or using face masks. 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.

The symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure. Reported illnesses have ranged from people with little to no symptoms (like the common cold) to people becoming severely ill and dying.



For employers who have had employees travel for either business or vacation, the CDC has updated its guidance:

- Anyone who has returned from a country with a level 2 or higher travel alert – China, Italy, Japan Iran and South Korea – in the past 14 days and has developed symptoms such as coughing, fever, and shortness of breath, should contact the Division of Public Health at 1-888-295-5156.
- Any returning travelers, again within the last 14 days, from these countries who do not have symptoms are also asked to call DPH at 1-888-295-5156 so that we can provide guidance on self-monitoring for symptoms and what to do if you do develop symptoms.
- Both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, are asked to stay at home for 14 days after returning from travel. That means no work or no school, and to avoid large gatherings.

For more information and updates related to COVID-19, visit the DPH website at [de.gov/coronavirus](https://de.gov/coronavirus), where materials can be found in English, Simplified Chinese/Mandarin, Spanish and Haitian-Creole. In addition to updates on the global coronavirus disease outbreak, the website also contains tips for Delawareans, FAQs, and the number of returning travelers that DPH is currently monitoring, which is being updated regularly.