



NEWS RELEASE

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DPH Preparations for Potential Spread of COVID-19

ATLANTA – The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is working closely with the CDC, and state partners to prepare for a potential outbreak of COVID-19 in the U.S., including Georgia. The goal is to quickly identify cases of COVID-19 and take the appropriate public health action to reduce its spread and protect the general public. It is important to note that at this time, the overall risk of COVID-19 to the general public remains low.

“We urge Georgians to prepare for hurricanes or flooding or take measures to prevent flu, so preparing for an outbreak of COVID-19 is no different,” said Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., DPH commissioner. “DPH is working to make sure our health systems, first responders and county health departments have the resources they need to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak.”

DPH already has a detailed pandemic flu plan that was developed in partnership with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, the Georgia Department of Education and other state agencies, and will be adapted for a COVID-19 outbreak in the state. DPH has responded to other serious disease outbreaks, including Ebola and Zika virus and each instance has provided new insight and guidance and highlighted the need to be as prepared as we can be.

DPH Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) is providing CDC information and guidance about COVID-19 to all health care and hospital facilities throughout Georgia, and holding weekly calls with the entire public health and hospital/health care community to update information and answer questions.

DPH epidemiologists are on-call 24/7 to help health care providers evaluate individuals presenting with symptoms of COVID-19 to ensure that possible cases are managed safely, support laboratory testing and implement recommendations from the CDC. In the event of COVID-19 in Georgia, epidemiologists would also be monitoring outbreaks and recommending control strategies, including guidance regarding testing and isolation.

Should it become necessary, DPH may recommend appropriate community mitigation measures for affected communities, such as temporary closure of child care facilities and schools/colleges and universities, school and workplace social distancing measures, and postponement or cancellation of mass gatherings. Additionally, businesses should consider ways to implement strategies to reduce the impact of a potential COVID-19 outbreak on their workforce, including teleworking and cross-training employees on essential job functions.

The same measures that are urged to prevent the spread of any respiratory virus are increasingly important for all Georgians:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or use a tissue to cover it, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

The best prevention against the flu is vaccination. Flu is still widespread and active in Georgia - it's not too late to get a flu shot.

Passenger screening at Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport is ongoing. This is to identify people coming from China who may have been exposed to and are at risk of developing COVID-19, and to provide appropriate assessment and monitoring to protect the general public.

COVID-19 is rapidly evolving and guidance is subject to change. The preparations currently underway in Georgia are based on the best scientific information we have from the CDC. DPH will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation, and work with state partners and health care communities to incorporate the most up to date guidance in our planning and preparation efforts.

DPH will continue to update Georgians through our website <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>, our Facebook page and our Twitter account. It is important to remember that the most accurate and timely information regarding this outbreak is available through DPH or the CDC's website <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

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About the Georgia Department of Public Health

The Georgia Department of Public Health is the lead agency in preventing disease, injury and disability; promoting health and well-being; and preparing for and responding to disasters from a health perspective. For more information about DPH, visit www.dph.ga.gov.