



Public Health Briefing

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What Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Means for Eastern Sierra Communities

On February 26, 2020, the California Department of Public Health confirmed that a California resident from Solano County was hospitalized with novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and likely caught the illness from someone in the community. At the time this information was released, this was the first person in the United States with confirmed COVID-19 infection who has not traveled outside the United States or had contact with known cases.

Most people who contract COVID-19, have mild disease. Severe illness seems uncommon in children, and no deaths have been reported in children under 9 years old. In some cases, the infection can lead to serious illness or death, particularly in older people with other health conditions. COVID-19 primarily causes respiratory symptoms, fever, cough and fatigue, and may progress to pneumonia. Cold symptoms such as runny nose and sore throat are uncommon with this coronavirus and usually indicate simple colds.

Health officials expect to see an increase in the number of people who catch the virus in community settings. It is time to think about ways to reduce chances of getting the virus and of spreading it to others. The COVID-19 virus spreads like the flu, mostly by inhaling the tiny droplets produced by coughing and sneezing in close quarters, and sometimes by getting virus on our hands and then touching our nose, eyes or mouth.

Scientists are working urgently to develop vaccines and anti-viral medications for this new virus, but it will be months or years before they are ready for use. Treatment for this disease, like many viral illnesses, is supportive. Most people who get sick will recover on their own. Patients who are severely ill may need to be hospitalized. Treatment is likely to change over time as we learn more about this new disease.

There are simple things everyone should do now at work, home, school, and in the community to reduce the spread of COVID-19, as well as flu and common colds:

- Wash your hands frequently using soap for at least 20 seconds and lathering your palms, fingers, fingertips, backs of your hands and under your nails.
- When no handwashing facilities are available, disinfect your hands with alcohol sanitizer (containing 60% or more alcohol).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay away from others when you are sick, particularly by staying home from work or school.
- Cover your mouth with tissue or your arm when coughing or sneezing (not your hand). If available, you may wear a surgical mask when you are sick to protect people around you.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Encourage employees and students to stay home from work or school when they are sick.

- Businesses can encourage sick customers and clients to complete business through phone, email, or other means which do not require face-to-face interactions when possible.
- Consider “social distancing” to reduce your interactions with other people, especially if you are older or have medical conditions such as heart or lung disease, diabetes or cancer, which increase the chance of severe illness if you are infected with the COVID-19 virus.
- If you are sick with fever and cough or shortness of breath, please let your doctor’s office or hospital emergency room know of your symptoms before you come, so that precautions can be taken to reduce spreading it to other people. Similarly, if you need an ambulance, let the 911 dispatcher know that you have symptoms that might mean COVID-19.

Mono and Inyo County public health officials are and will continue to communicate with medical facilities, emergency personnel, schools, businesses and other community resources to provide guidance on COVID-19 and possible prevention measures that can be taken as the situation evolves.

For current and reliable information about COVID-19 go to the websites of the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; www.cdc.gov) or the California Department of Public Health (www.cdph.ca.gov).

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