For Immediate Release

No cases of coronavirus suspected or diagnosed in West Virginia, says Monongalia County Health Department

MORGANTOWN, WV (Feb. 5, 2020) — No individuals in West Virginia have been diagnosed with coronavirus or are suspected of having the illness that has become the focus of an outbreak than began in Wuhan, China.

Instead, noted Dr. Lee B. Smith, Monongalia County Health Department executive director and county health officer, six individuals, including four in Monongalia County, are currently undergoing self-quarantine. Five of these individuals recently returned from China; one person in Monongalia County has interacted with people returning from China.

“This is the same procedure that anyone returning to the United States from China will be undergoing,” Dr. Smith said. “This is now standard procedure, so people who re-enter the United States from China can be monitored to make sure they do not develop any coronavirus symptoms.”

Anyone returning in the near future until further notice will also undergo this same two-week self-quarantine to monitor symptoms. CDC says symptoms can emerge from two days to two weeks after exposure.

Dr. Smith spoke to the Monongalia County Commission on Wednesday morning to update them on the local response to coronavirus.

MCHD is working under guidelines set forth by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which issued a health alert on Saturday updating its guidance on dealing with the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). This update provides guidance to clinicians and public health officials on how to deal with individuals in their communities as they return from China.
Symptoms of coronavirus include a fever of at least 101.4 degrees Fahrenheit, a cough and shortness of breath. These symptoms are similar to other upper respiratory illnesses, including seasonal flu, which is currently widespread in West Virginia and most of the nation.

“This is the typical big season for respiratory illnesses, so even if someone has symptoms, it could just be seasonal influenza or another illness,” Dr. Smith said.

If anyone has recently returned from China develops symptoms, they are requested to refrain from going to a hospital emergency department, urgent care or physician office and sit in a waiting room. Instead, they should call one of two lines that are taking calls. People will be triaged by phone and if a medical visit is warranted, they will receive instructions that will include instructions on where to go, to wear a medical mask, etc.

“We don’t want people just showing up to an emergency department or doctor’s office and wait to be seen in an area where they would be around other patients,” Dr. Smith said.

Those phone numbers to call for guidance are the WVU Medical Access and Referral System (MARS) line at 304-598-6000 and Mon Health Medical Center at 304-285-3798.

There are currently 11 positive cases of coronavirus diagnosed in the United States. These cases are in five states: Washington state, California, Arizona, Illinois and Massachusetts. Another 206 individuals have been tested and were found to be negative. Seventy-six cases are pending.

In the meantime, Dr. Smith said, people should practice the same commonsense measures they would observe to avoid influenza. “Wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes and if you do get sick, stay home,” he said.

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