For Immediate Release

MCHD coordinating with WVU Hospitals, Mon Health, others on coronavirus message

MORGANTOWN, WV (Feb. 4, 2020) — Monongalia County Health Department is coordinating with state health officials, local hospitals and first responders to communicate Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) messaging regarding the novel coronavirus aimed at area residents who have recently returned from China.

CDC issued a health alert on Saturday updating its guidance on dealing with the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) that began in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. This update provides guidance to clinicians and public health officials on how to deal with individuals in their communities as they return from China.

Anyone who returned from China in the past two weeks and develops upper respiratory symptoms should refrain from visiting an emergency department, urgent care or physician office. Instead, two phone lines in Morgantown are accepting calls from people who want to discuss their symptoms and how to deal with them. This will continue to be the case for individuals returning from China for the foreseeable future.

“Not all fevers are coronavirus,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer. “We are in the midst of influenza season and there are always upper respiratory viruses in our community.”

Instead, he said, “We want to get a message to those travelers who have returned from China in the past two weeks and who would be returning from China in the near future.”

CDC is closely monitoring an outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus first identified in Wuhan in late 2019. There have been thousands of confirmed cases in China and additional cases have been identified in a growing number of other international locations, including the United States.
As of Feb. 3, there were 11 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the U.S. So far, U.S. cases have been in Washington state, California, Arizona, Illinois and Massachusetts.

Symptoms of coronavirus can be similar to other upper respiratory illnesses. They include fever (at least 101.4 degrees Fahrenheit), a cough and shortness of breath.

Guidance has been divided into three categories: (1) individuals with fever OR signs of lower respiratory illness AND who have had close contact with a person confirmed to have 2019-nCoV within 14 days of symptom onset; (2) fever AND symptoms of lower respiratory illness AND a history of travel from Hubei province, China, within 14 days of symptom onset; and, (3) fever AND symptoms of lower respiratory illness requiring hospitalization AND a history of travel from mainland China within 14 days of symptom onset.

“People who traveled in China six months ago or any other time frame outside this two-week window would not need to be concerned with this guidance,” Dr. Smith said.

On Monday and Tuesday, Dr. Smith worked with officials from WVU Hospitals, Mon Health Medical Center, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), MECCA 911 and the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health to coordinate the response that local patients who have been to China recently would receive if they have serious concerns about coronavirus.

Health officials want to avoid having individuals with symptoms going to a hospital emergency department, urgent care or physician office and sit in a waiting room. Anyone with serious concerns about coronavirus will be given instructions on how to avoid potential transmission of an illness, such as by wearing a face mask and by making a plan with a health care provider to be seen.

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.

On Sunday, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued a statement saying that U.S. citizens who have been in Hubei province within 14 days of their return will be subject to up to 14 days of mandatory quarantine. U.S. citizens who have been in other areas of mainland China within 14 days of their return will undergo proactive entry health screening and up to 14 days of self-quarantine with health monitoring to ensure they do not have the virus.

“We want to be clear that we are following CDC guidelines and that individuals, depending upon their risk, may be asked to have a two-week self-quarantine,” Dr. Smith said.
For more information, check out cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

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