



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Health Department Provides Briefing on Monitoring, Preparation for COVID-19

PITTSBURGH – Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) officials today held a briefing to share information on the steps that the department is taking with its partners to prepare for any community spread of the coronavirus disease 2019, named COVID-19, Dr. Lee Harrison, Chair of the Board of Health, was joined by Dr. Kristen Mertz, ACHD Medical Epidemiologist, and Dr. LuAnn Brink, ACHD Chief Epidemiologist.

“There has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes at the Health Department to assure that we are prepared for a possible outbreak,” said Harrison. “Because of the public health importance of this issue, we are sharing the steps that the department is taking with its partners to stem any community spread, as well as providing information on what residents can do now to help protect themselves and their families.”

ACHD has been monitoring the outbreak and has been involved in ongoing briefings by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Its leadership has also been providing briefings and guidance to many partners in the community, including emergency service providers at the county and city level which were also represented at this morning’s presser.

Although the current likelihood of local exposure remains low, ACHD continues to investigate possible cases and will utilize the capabilities of the state public health lab, which will begin testing this week. At this time, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania, but some are expected as testing is expanded.

“Even though there are still a lot of unknowns about this new virus, we are learning more every day,” said Mertz. “We have spent years preparing for flu pandemics, and many strategies are applicable to COVID-19. Residents can take common sense precautions and practice healthy habits to limit the spread of germs.”

Everyone can play a part in responding to this emerging public health threat. It is currently flu and respiratory disease season and the CDC recommends that getting a flu vaccine and taking everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of germs. This includes staying home when you are sick; covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, elbow or sleeve; practicing good hand hygiene; avoiding shaking hands; and routinely cleaning frequently-touched surfaces and objects. Routine use of these measures by individuals and their families can go a long way to prevent the spread of illness and help respond to any outbreak.

“Preparing for public health emergencies requires continual and coordinated efforts that involve every level of government, the private sector, and residents,” said Brink. “We’re fortunate to have so many stakeholders in this region who have been engaged and involved since possible exposure to COVID-19 first became a concern. These partners include healthcare providers and health care systems, schools and universities, and transportation agencies.”

In addition to the daily communication with state and federal health agencies, ACHD continues to update its own information and guidance accordingly. As a result, information has been shared with stakeholders and partners throughout the county, including the Airport Authority and Port Authority.

For all businesses and organizations, CDC has recommended actively encouraging sick employees to stay home or separating sick employees; emphasizing cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene; performing routine cleaning of frequently-touched surfaces and objects; and providing disposable wipes for employees to use on frequently-touched surfaces.

“We are committed to ensuring that we continue to provide the most up-to-date information on the coronavirus,” said Interim Director Ronald A. Sugar, Esq. “We encourage the public and our partners to use the Health Department’s website, sign up for Allegheny Alerts, and follow us on social media for ongoing updates.”

ACHD has created a dedicated page for information on COVID-19 at www.alleghenycounty.us/coronavirus. Additionally, residents are encouraged to create an Allegheny Alert account at www.alleghenycounty.us/alerts and to subscribe for COVID-19 alerts under the categories of Health Department/Health & Environment. The department is also on Facebook (www.facebook.com/AlleghenyCountyHealth) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/HealthAllegheny).

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