February 26, 2020

The City of Newton continues to monitor the novel coronavirus outbreak – Covid-19. The risk in Massachusetts remains low and Mass had one confirmed case of Covid-19. This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. The Newton Health and Human Services Department (HHS) is following public health guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). The city will continue to keep Newton residents informed, monitor the situation and implement CDC and MDPH guidance at the local level.

A Covid-19 subcommittee of the city’s regular Emergency Management working group will coordinate communication and preparedness efforts. The multidisciplinary group includes public health, public safety, emergency management, Newton Public Schools, Newton-Wellesley Hospital and the executive office. HHS public health staff have been preparing locally for emerging infectious diseases for many years. While Covid-19 is new, the communication and infrastructure around public health preparedness and response is not. Here are some things you can do:

**Keep yourself and others healthy**
- Wash your hands with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

**Know the facts** and help prevent the spread of rumors
- Be sure you’re using a reliable source for your information.
  - CDC updates its website frequently with extensive guidance and Covid-19 details [www.cdc.gov/nCoV](http://www.cdc.gov/nCoV)
  - Massachusetts updates from MDPH are available at [https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus](https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus)
  - Newton updates are posted in the “City News” section of the website, and additional information is available at [www.newtonma.gov/covid19](http://www.newtonma.gov/covid19)
- History has seen many instances of societies excluding, blaming, or devaluing those feared to have a disease. Examples include the Ebola, HIV, and past influenza pandemics where fear led to stigma and discrimination. In many instances, the discriminatory actions caused the health problems to worsen because those who felt stigmatized avoided seeking access to the health care and information they need.
- Face masks are not recommended for the general public at this time. Masks can be useful in some settings, such as a clinic waiting room, to prevent someone who has a respiratory illness from spreading it to others. There is no hard evidence that wearing a mask protects the wearer outside of the healthcare setting.
- Cancelling public events is not currently recommended. There are no indications that COVID-19 is spreading in our communities at this time. The health risk to the general public in Massachusetts remains low.

Questions about coronavirus may be directed to the city’s Health and Human Services Department at (617) 796-1420.