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Contact: Veronica Vien, 415-554-2566, veronica.vien@sfdph.org

San Francisco Department of Public Health preparation for novel coronavirus response

The San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH) is actively preparing to respond to the novel (new) coronavirus originating in Wuhan, China that has sickened more than 800 people worldwide since December, approximately 25 of whom have died.

To date, San Francisco has no confirmed cases of the new illness. The national Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began screening travelers at SFO on January 18 who were arriving from Wuhan.

The CDC is the lead agency for this event, and we are working closely with them, and the California Department of Public Health, on this rapidly evolving situation, in order to stay up to date about new developments. The CDC has been screening arriving passengers at five United States airports, and has confirmed two cases in this country, one in Washington state and one in Chicago.

San Francisco’s DPH activated its Departmental Operations Center (DOC) on January 21, which is a formal mechanism to organize emergency preparedness and response, bringing together clinical and operations experts throughout the department. The DOC meets twice a week to report progress and identify and solve issues that arise. Our first preparedness priorities have been accomplished:

- Issue health advisories to San Francisco providers about the symptoms of the virus and what steps to take if they have a patient who may have the illness.
- Communicate with all city hospitals and identify isolation rooms in case of incoming patients with the new virus.
- Collaborate with the San Francisco Department of Emergency Management (DEM) on citywide preparation and information sharing.
- Establish transport protocols with the Emergency Medical Services to ensure that ambulances are prepared for incoming patients and are able to take infection control precautions for safe transport.
• Arrange for direct delivery of specimens from the DPH lab to the CDC lab for testing any suspect cases.
• Communicate with SFO and the San Mateo County Health Department (where SFO is located) to establish plans for transporting patients to San Francisco, if needed.
• Inform the community about the facts of novel coronavirus and how to stay healthy and safe. We created fact sheets in English and Chinese and disseminated to the public, the Chinese media and providers and community organizations in the Chinese community.

At this time, residents of the Bay Area are at low risk of becoming infected with this novel (new) coronavirus, unless they have recently traveled to Wuhan or have come in close contact with someone who was ill who recently traveled in that area.

The seven Bay Area Departments of Public Health (San Francisco, Alameda, Marin, Contra Costa, San Mateo, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, and the City of Berkeley) are tightly coordinated, monitoring the issue, learning about the disease from the CDC, and will be tracking any cases that are confirmed in the Bay Area to ensure appropriate precautions across the region.

San Franciscans can still protect their health by taking preventive measures such as consistent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes and staying home if sick. It’s not too late to get a flu shot to help prevent illness and symptoms similar to the novel (new) coronavirus.

DPH is continuing to monitor the situation and as conditions change we are prepared to implement additional measures and work with DEM to respond and protect the health of the city and all residents.

The CDC is the main source for up to date information on the virus: 