News you can Use about 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

SUMMARY
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to closely monitor the outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Coronaviruses are in a family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory disease, such as the common cold. However, novel coronavirus has the potential to cause severe disease and death.

The numbers remain fluid, but, as of February 23, 2020, the CDC reported 76,936 cases in mainland China and 1,875 cases in locations outside mainland China. There have been 2,462 associated deaths worldwide; no deaths have been reported in the United States. Fourteen cases have been diagnosed in the United States, and an additional 39 cases have occurred among repatriated persons from high-risk settings, for a current total of 53 cases within the United States. The CDC is still investigating if a possible first “community-based” case has occurred in California.

To detect possible cases of COVID-19 infection early and prevent spread, the United States is actively screening incoming travelers from China at select airports.

Persons with symptoms of lower respiratory illness AND recent travel outside of the United States should see a healthcare provider for evaluation. Healthcare providers are asked to report patients under investigation (PUI) for novel coronavirus to local or state health department personnel immediately.

As of February 25, 2020, 42 countries have had confirmed cases, including the United States, where 57 individuals confirmed positive with the virus and 17 countries with 3 or less cases. The CDC website will continue to have updates a few times a week. The page contains information useful to employers, such as “Share the Facts, Stop Fear”.

YOU SHOULD KNOW:

What is Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)?
COVID-19 is a virus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China. It was first reportedly linked to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, a growing number of patients without exposure to animal markets, indicates person-to-person spread is occurring.

How is it spread?
The CDC's current understanding of spread is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses. When person-to-person spread of coronaviruses has previously occurred, it is thought to have happened mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread.

What is the risk of contracting COVID-19?
Per CDC investigation, COVID-19 is considered a very serious public health threat. However, based on current information the immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general American public is still considered low at this time. Available information suggests that older adults and people with underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems may be at increased risk of severe disease if possibly exposed in travel.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?
In confirmed cases of COVID-19 infections, symptoms have ranged from infected people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying. Per CDC report, symptoms of 2019-nCoV may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure and can include symptoms of lower respiratory illness (fever, cough, and shortness of breath).
How do I prevent catching COVID-19?
Avoiding exposure is the best course for prevention. However, the CDC recommends everyday actions to help prevent the spread of this and other respiratory viruses, including:

- Proper and regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces (keyboards, phones, counters, etc.).
- Follow CDC guidance regarding travel to areas with higher risk of exposure.

Should people wear masks?
The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. More information

What are the travel guidelines to prevent catching COVID-19?
The CDC has currently issued a Level 3 Warning which recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China.

The US Department of State issued a “do not travel” advisory to China, and airlines around the world have cancelled or scaled back flights. U.S. companies are being advised to stop employee travel to high-risk countries and to develop plans to address a possible U.S. expansion of the virus, which may require limiting employee travel within the U.S. and outlining work-from-home strategies.

What is a pandemic?
A pandemic is defined as a disease that spreads easily from person to person in many parts of the world. The CDC has said the coronavirus has now met two of the criteria for a pandemic and is moving closer to meeting the third criteria, which is worldwide spread.

What next?
CDC investigations are ongoing. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other facts associated with COVID-19. We will update as more information is made available. Contact your local health department for additional questions and questions specific to your community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

CDC
OSHA
World Health Organization
European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention
National Law Review – Employers Should Plan, Not Panic
CDC – Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers
John Hopkins Virus Tracker

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