

Talking Points: 2019 Novel Coronavirus

SPEAKER: COMMISSIONER JAN MALCOLM

EVENT: CORONAVIRUS PREPARATIONS MEDIA BRIEFING

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Key Messages

- *Recent developments with the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) indicate that the disease is now reaching a point of a global outbreak.*
- *While we have yet to identify a case in Minnesota, developments around the world show that we must expect the outbreak to reach our state.*
- *Regardless of the number of cases at any given time, there will be impacts in Minnesota, including health, economic and social impacts.*
- *Now is the time to prepare at all levels: individuals, families, organizations and communities.*
- *There may be challenging times ahead, but if we all work together and everyone does their part, Minnesota will significantly reduce the negative impacts and make it through the COVID-19 pandemic.*

General Messages

- Thank you for joining us today.
- As we mentioned at the start of our media briefing one month ago, I want to let everyone know that we are not holding this briefing to announce a first Minnesota case of COVID-19. Instead, we want to update you on how the outbreak has progressed, and what the implications are for Minnesota.
- International public health officials have been working hard in recent weeks to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak that started in Wuhan, China. The goal of containment – or stopping the epidemic before it could spread to other parts of the world - was an aggressive approach that has worked in the past with other viruses like SARS.
- However, every virus and every outbreak is different. And over the last week we've seen reports of the illness spreading in communities in multiple countries outside of China. This development makes the containment goal more difficult and requires that public health officials in other parts of the world shift from a containment mindset to a preparedness mindset.
- While the reported number of cases in the United States remains relatively small and Minnesota has yet to identify a case, we must anticipate that one or more cases of COVID-19 will be confirmed in Minnesota in the weeks to come.

- The good news is that we have a window of opportunity before that happens to make some practical preparations.
- In the earliest stages of an outbreak there is a natural focus on what public health officials and the health care sector are doing. There is still a lot of work going on there, but we're entering a phase in which it also matters how households, neighborhoods, community groups, and businesses prepare.
- Two key goals for all of us are to find ways to minimize the spread of the virus and to reduce demands on our health care sector so the most seriously ill people get the supportive care they need.
- Unfortunately, because the virus is a new kind of infection, we don't have some of the normal medical interventions at our disposal. For example, researchers are working hard to develop a vaccine and anti-viral drugs for COVID-19. But it will be many months before those are ready for distribution.
- This means we need to rely on what are called "non-pharmaceutical interventions." That's a fancy term for things like covering your cough, washing your hands and staying home when you are sick.
- Every fall as we enter cold and flu season you hear us emphasize the value of protecting yourself and others by covering your cough, washing your hands, and staying home when you are sick. Those same prevention strategies are important now as we prepare to fight COVID-19.
- Staying home when sick is a straightforward "stop the spread" tip that can actually be fairly difficult in practice, either because people have no sick leave or they feel otherwise compelled to show up and tough it out.
- We are urging employers and employees alike to consider that staying home when sick protects not only other employees but also the larger workforce of that organization. One sick employee can be a productivity impact, but an entire team of sick employees can become a much bigger problem.
- We're also recommending that organizations identify critical functions and develop plans for how to staff those functions even with elevated absences.
- While it would be great to keep the virus out of Minnesota entirely, we also know that there is value in slowing the spread and reducing the total number of people infected at any given time. This can help reduce the overall demand on our health care providers and help ensure that the people with most severe illness get the care they need.
- There may be challenging times ahead, but if we all work together and everyone does their part, Minnesota will significantly reduce the negative impacts and make it through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- With that, I will turn it over to Dr. Ruth Lynfield, our state epidemiologist and medical director, to provide an update on the outbreak globally and what we know about the illnesses.