Fifth Case of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Confirmed in the United States

Although this is a serious public health threat, the CDC says the immediate risk to the American public is low.

January 28, 2020 By Alicia Green

Update: On January 30, 2020, the WHO has declared the new coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of international concern. The CDC also confirmed the first instance of person-to-person spread of 2019-nCov in the United States. This brings the number of confirmed cases to six. Immediate risk to the general public is still low. There will likely be more cases of 2019-nCoV reported in the United States in the coming days and weeks, including more person-to-person spread, the health agency says. Officials are also reporting that the total number of cases and deaths in mainland China has risen to more than 8,100 and to 171, respectively.

As the world continues to learn more about the origin of a novel coronavirus, christened 2019-nCoV (COVID-19), and how it spreads among humans, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed a fifth case in the United States. This brings the total number of states with confirmed cases to four—Arizona, California, Illinois and Washington.

What is a coronavirus? According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

Like the coronaviruses that cause MERS and SARS, 2019-nCoV is transmitted between animals, such as cattle, cats and bats, and people. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans, says the WHO.

Common signs of infection include fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. More severe cases of infection can lead to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

Officials are working domestically and abroad to learn more about this new virus. According to the CDC, those individuals in the United States who are infected with the virus had recently traveled to Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in China, where the outbreak of respiratory illness was first reported in December 2019.

While more than 4,500 cases have been reported in mainland China, the total number of deaths has surpassed 100, says CNN. Several cases have been documented in other countries, including Japan, Thailand and Australia, bringing the total number to 4,585.

“We understand that some people are worried about this virus and how it may impact Americans,” says the CDC which has issued new guidance regarding the virus. “Outbreaks of new diseases are always of concern—and in today’s connected world, an outbreak anywhere can be a risk everywhere….while this is a serious public health threat, CDC continues to believe the immediate risk to the U.S. general public is low at this time.”

Although it has been reported that the virus has been transmitted among those in close contact with travelers returning from Wuhan to other parts of China, the CDC says no person-to-person spread has been detected in the United States at this time.

The CDC is recommending that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Hubei province. Additionally, the agency suggests that people traveling to other parts of China should follow commonsense health precautions, such as avoiding contact with those who are sick and practicing good hand hygiene.

Besides the daily precautions that everyone should always take, the CDC advises folks to get a flu vaccine, observe everyday preventive actions to avoid spreading germs and take antivirals if prescribed.

In addition, the CDC is closely monitoring travelers for illness and providing educational materials at 20 airports with quarantine stations to any individuals arriving in the United States from China. The health agency has also sent teams to assist health departments currently caring for people with the virus.

The WHO issued the following advice to the public about how to reduce exposure to and transmission of the novel coronavirus: clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or with soap and water; cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow; avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms; thoroughly cook meat and eggs; and avoid unprotected contact with live wild or farm animals.

If you or someone you know has a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, the WHO suggests seeking medical care early and sharing previous travel history with your doctor.

As the CDC learns more about this novel coronavirus, updates will follow. For now, heed current instructions and protect yourself as best as you can. That said, for those in the United States reportedly rushing to buy surgical masks, there is no evidence to support this response, which the CDC has said is unnecessary for Americans.

For related coverage, read “New Coronavirus in China Is Treated With HIV Meds.”

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