

The **Columbus County Health Department** is aggressively monitoring the global outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus and preparing for the spread of the disease in the U.S. including North Carolina. As of this writing there are no reported cases in North Carolina.

Learn more how Federal, State and local personnel and agencies are preparing its communities for potential spread of the Novel Coronavirus at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/preparing-communities.html>

Always rely on reputable resources available such as the NC Division of Public Health website: <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/COVID19.html>

We encourage everyone to continue to protect yourself and others by:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water, and for at least 20 seconds each time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not reuse tissue after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.

The actions listed above will also protect people against influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and other respiratory infections that are common in North Carolina and the U.S. this time of year.

## **Governor's Task Force Encourages North Carolinians to Increase Preparedness Measures for COVID-19**

Governor Roy Cooper's Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Task Force continues to prepare for the possibility of COVID-19 infections occurring in North Carolina and is encouraging businesses, schools, health care providers, communities and individuals to prepare as well. Currently, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in North Carolina.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) has indicated that Americans should be anticipating and preparing for the possibility of widespread COVID-19 in the United States. Since late January, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and NC Emergency Management (NCEM) have been operating a team to coordinate efforts around the state's response. In early February, Governor Cooper formalized this effort with the [creation of the COVID-19 Task Force](#).

“NCDHHS has been coordinating with the CDC and state and local partners to prepare for COVID-19 since the beginning of the outbreak in China,” said Dr. Elizabeth Cuervo Tilson,

State Health Director and Chief Medical Officer for NCDHHS. “We are asking North Carolinians to continue to plan ahead for the possibility of the spread of the infection, while the risk for North Carolina is currently low.”

NCDHHS and NCEM are working closely with local health departments, health care providers and others to quickly identify and respond to any potential isolated cases that might occur in the state and prepare North Carolinians to be ready in the event of more widespread, national COVID-19 transmission. The Task Force is developing response plans that address a range of possible scenarios. NCDHHS continues to host regular calls with local health providers and partners, develop and disseminate information and guidance and respond to questions from providers and communities.

“We have been working closely with our Public Health and Office of Emergency Medical Services partners to ensure our preparedness for all scenarios as it relates to COVID-19 infection,” said Director of Emergency Management Mike Sprayberry, who co-chairs the Governor’s Task Force with Dr. Tilson. “We would rather be over prepared to protect the health and well-being of North Carolinians.”

The following are common-sense measures all North Carolinians can take to prepare for potential widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the state:

### **Individuals, Families and Communities**

- NCDHHS recommends everyone continue taking precautions to protect themselves and others from the spread of respiratory illnesses, which includes COVID-19.
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and water, and for at least 20 seconds each time.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
  - Do not reuse tissue after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
  - Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.
- It is also good practice to start being more aware of the number of times a day your hands touch an object or hard surface and then touch your face without being washed. Limiting the exposure of your nose, mouth and eyes to unwashed hands can help to protect from the spread of all germs and illnesses.
- Have a plan in case you need to miss work or other responsibilities due to personal illness or to care for a sick family member.
- For pregnant women and children, review the [information and guidance available on the CDC website](#).

### **Businesses and Employers**

- Practice good hand hygiene and encourage your employees and patrons to take common-sense precautions to protect themselves from the spread of respiratory illnesses.

- Review your policies and procedures for remote or teleworking where possible.
- Cross-train employees for key functions so that daily schedules can continue relatively uninterrupted by potential employee absences.
- Review absenteeism policies to make sure employees are not being encouraged to come to work if they are sick.
- If you have not already, establish a relationship with your [local health department](#) and communicate with them if you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19.
- Look for more updates and [guidance for businesses available on the CDC website](#).

### **Health Care Providers and Hospitals**

- Review policies and procedures for infection prevention and mitigation, and make sure that all employees are aware of and following the appropriate steps.
- Consider how to maximize the use of telemedicine, nurse triage lines and other options to prevent sick people from coming to clinics and emergency rooms if they have mild illness and do not need treatment.
- Continue implementing the [NCDHHS and CDC guidance for COVID-19](#) and continue working closely with your local health department and NCDHHS.
- Look for more updates and [information for health care professionals on the CDC website](#).

### **College, Universities, K-12 Schools and Child Care Facilities**

- Make sure all students, faculty and staff are aware of and practicing good hand hygiene and taking common-sense precautions to protect from the spread of respiratory illnesses.
- Review absenteeism policies and procedures to make sure students or children, faculty and staff are not being encouraged to attend or work if they are sick.
- If you have not already, establish a relationship with your [local health department](#) and communicate with them if you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19.
- [Learn more about COVID-19 on the CDC website](#), and look for updates and information for schools, colleges and childcare.

No one group, ethnicity or population in the US is at a higher risk for acquiring COVID-19 infection than others. While some people may be worried or have concerns about COVID-19, it is important to not let fear and anxiety [lead to social stigma](#) towards friends, neighbors or members of the community. Treat all people with compassion and speak up if you hear others making statements that cause stigma against people in your community.

All North Carolinians can better prepare for COVID-19 by getting up-to-date information directly from reliable sources like NCDHHS and the CDC. The COVID-19 outbreak has been accompanied by a global flood of misinformation from unreliable sources. Be thoughtful about what you read or hear about the virus and make sure you are separating rumor from fact before you act.

For more information on COVID-19, please visit the CDC's website at [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). North Carolina resources can be found on the Division of Public Health website at [ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus).

If you have questions or concerns, call the COVID-19 Helpline toll free at 1-866-462-3821. To submit questions online, go to [www.ncpoisoncontrol.org](https://www.ncpoisoncontrol.org) and select "chat."

**If you are a Columbus County resident and have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the Columbus County Health Department at 910-640-6615.**

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