

Corona Virus – Covid-19

The corona virus, now known as Covid-19 is spreading rapidly in the United States. Recently numerous cases have emerged in the U.S. with no known connection to travelers or people with the virus. The Centers for Disease Control is monitoring the situation carefully and updates almost daily. The first known fatality in the United States was reported on February 28. It involved a male in his 50's with underlying medical conditions. Many of the domestic Covid-19 infections have been reported by people who have recently traveled to countries where infection is prevalent. Large outbreaks are currently occurring in China, South Korea, Iran and Italy. Monitor your local news and health authorities for up to date information about Covid- 19 in your community.

The Centers for Disease Control updates its information frequently including a call-in that anyone can join for the most recent developments including questions from the press. You can reach the CDC at cdc.gov. Their call-in number for periodic briefings is 888-795-0855, passcode 4603973. They also post a transcript of the call after the call has concluded.

Texas Department of State Health Services also has current information about Covid-19 in Texas at their website dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/.

The CDC describes the symptoms as similar to a common cold. Most cases seem to resolve quickly but if symptoms persist or get worse consult your physician immediately. Pay special attention to the elderly and people with other disease processes such as diabetes, heart disease or compromised immune systems. As the disease spreads, Centers should stay informed and pay attention to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, local health departments and your doctors. Observe standard infection control protocols and common sense. Science based measures recommended by the CDC include:

Wash hands frequently using soap and water and scrubbing for at least 20 seconds

- If you are sick, stay home
- Use hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your face and eyes
- Consider eye protection for healthcare workers in contact with infected persons
- Isolate infected persons as much as possible from others
- Reduce travel to large gatherings
- Reduce personal contact with others, social distancing

A recent change in regulations governing test kits will now permit local labs and health agencies to do testing for the virus. This will make testing results available in less than 24 hours. Before this change, all tests had to be done by the CDC and could take three to four days to get results. This created delays in response. Texas now has five labs capable of doing the tests in Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, El Paso and Lubbock. Physicians may submit samples for testing to these labs. Texas HHSC anticipates additional labs opening later in March.

Stay in contact with your County-based Local Emergency Response team. They can help you with resources and concrete steps to take now to meet conditions if they get worse. Consider inventorying supplies the Center may need during a local outbreak such as hand sanitizers, surface disinfectants, paper products and personal protective equipment. The Fund is closely monitoring the outbreak and may have additional information and recommendations.
