VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

February 28, 2020 Update –
Vermont continues preparation efforts as COVID-19 spreads globally

As the novel coronavirus called COVID-19 spreads to a growing number of countries around the world, Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD said Friday that Vermont must prepare in the event that the virus reaches our state. At the direction of Governor Scott, Vermont Emergency Management plans to assemble an interagency task force to develop a comprehensive response plan.

There have been no known cases of people in Vermont with COVID-19 as of Feb. 28, 2020.

Because the highest risk for transmission has been China so far, public health nurses and epidemiologists have been monitoring people who have returned from travel in China and a few from other affected countries. Monitoring means checking their temperature every day, watching for symptoms, and for some people, asking them to stay home.

But Dr. Levine said the virus' global spread will soon make it impossible to get a handle on everyone who may have been exposed.

"That's why we're asking people to be aware, watch out for symptoms if you've traveled – and stay home when you're sick," he said.

The Health Department is asking anyone who has traveled to countries where there is transmission to call 802-863-7240. Health officials will let you know what to look for and guide you on what to do if you develop symptoms that could be from coronavirus. They will also offer to touch base a few times a week.

As of February 28, 27 people are being monitored, and 15 people have completed their monitoring.

The Health Department Lab now has the test for the virus from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and could begin testing soon, should it be needed.

As the state continues its monitoring to identify cases, Vermont is also preparing for further person-to-person spread in the U.S., including planning for community-wide strategies to slow disease transmission.

These strategies could include "social distancing," to limit where and when people come together – such as teleworking, restricting mass gatherings, closing public facilities and the like.

"There is no need to exercise any of these options at this time – but now is the time for all of us to prepare mentally and logistically for possible disruptions to our daily lives," Dr. Levine said.

The Health Department continues its preparation and response work through its Health Operations Center, opened in early February. It has been alerting health care providers, and

providing guidance and updates on our website, via our Health Alert Network, and the news media. Vermont Emergency Management has been a part of the HOC team.

With the task force assembled by Vermont Emergency Management, the Health Department will begin working to ensure state agencies and communities, schools, businesses around the state are prepared to minimize potential disruptions.

Right now, the most important thing for Vermonters to do is to take action to help prevent the spread of respiratory illness:

· Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.

· Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or a tissue, not your hands.

· Stay home when you're sick, especially with a fever, except to get medical care.

· Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

· Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

· Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

· And get your flu shot – flu is still widespread in Vermont.

"As always, prepare yourselves and your families for the possibility that you'd need to stay home for a few weeks," Dr. Levine said.

Get the most current information at healthvermont.gov/covid19, which includes Vermont-specific updates and resources, in addition to content from the CDC.