Governor Mills, Maine CDC Announce First Presumptive Positive Case and Additional Steps to Respond to COVID-19

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Governor announces insurance emergency proclamation, temporary suspension of non-essential out-of-state work travel for State employees, and a recommendation to postpone large, indoor gatherings

Augusta, MAINE – Governor Janet Mills and the Maine CDC announced today Maine's first presumptive positive case of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Maine. The individual who tested positive is a woman in her 50s from Androscoggin County. The Maine CDC is speaking to the individual and her medical provider to assess travel history and begin to investigate possible community exposure. The individual is quarantined at her home.

"The Maine CDC has been preparing for this eventuality since the end of last year," **said Governor Mills**. "With one presumptive positive case, Maine has a unique window of opportunity to delay an outbreak, like those we see in other states, and to minimize our exposure."

"Maine CDC has been preparing for more than two months for the eventual arrival of COVID-19," **said Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine CDC**. "As we work to ensure the best care for this individual, we are not seeing widespread community transmission in Maine. The recommendation we make today is designed to limit potential spread of the virus here."

The individual's test sample will be sent to the U.S. CDC for confirmation. Test results on other individuals are pending. Maine CDC will inform the public if positive tests are confirmed and will offer regular updates on testing recommendations. Positive test results will be posted to Maine CDC's coronavirus webpage.

Governor Mills had already formulated additional steps her Administration is taking to reduce the possible spread of the disease, and announced these steps today.

These steps include: 1) proclaiming an insurance emergency to improve access to care and require private health insurance plans to cover costs related to coronavirus testing; 2) suspending all non-essential out-of-state work travel by State employees; and 3) recommending, on the advice of Maine CDC, that non-essential large, indoor gatherings of 250 attendees or more be postponed in order to delay a potential coronavirus outbreak and substantially reduce its spread.

Last week, Governor Mills convened a Coronavirus Response Team, led by Maine CDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah and comprised of key individuals in her Administration, to coordinate State government's response across departments and local agencies and health authorities to the threat of COVID-19. The response team builds on the work that has already been done by the Maine CDC to prepare for potential cases of COVID-19.

The steps announced by Governor Mills today include:

Proclaiming An Insurance Emergency: Under Maine law, Governor Mills has the authority to proclaim an insurance emergency in order to respond to "an existing or imminent likelihood of need for a significant increase in health care services or insurance benefit payments due to injuries or sickness." The proclamation, which Governor Mills signed today, allows the Superintendent of the Maine Bureau of Insurance to require health insurance carriers providing health care coverage in Maine's commercial market to cover costs related to coronavirus testing and increases access to care. While this proclamation affects only private insurance sold in the commercial market, the Department of Health and Human Services is also issuing emergency rules to ensure MaineCare provides comprehensive coverage for lab testing and medical treatment. The Maine Bureau of Insurance has determined the extent of the coverage required and issued its own proclamation today. Taking this action will help ensure that Maine people are not burdened by costs or deterred from seeking testing or important medical care related to the coronavirus.

"For our MaineCare members, we will ensure that coverage for lab testing and medical care is comprehensive," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "We encourage anyone who develops a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing, to call their health care provider."

"The cost of health care is a real concern for many Maine people," **said Bureau of Insurance Superintendent Eric Cioppa.** "The Governor's action today will help to alleviate apprehension among those with private insurance about the financial implications of seeking testing for the 2019 novel coronavirus."

Limiting State Employee Travel: Governor Mills today suspended all non-essential State employee travel outside the State of Maine to limit possible exposure to the coronavirus in other states. The determination of whether travel is or is not essential will be left to the discretion of Department Commissioners, and the need for the directive will be evaluated within the next 30 days.

"Over the past two weeks, DAFS has scaled up its effort to protect the health and safety of State employees. We are in regular communication with our departments, and we have increased how often we clean and sanitize our state offices, especially common spaces," **said DAFS Commissioner Kirsten Figueroa.** "This new, temporary limitation will help further protect the safety of the State's employees as well as the people we are fortunate to serve. As one of the largest employers in the state, it is important that we take precautions like this to ensure that we can continue to fully and effectively serve the people of Maine."

Recommending Postponing Large, Indoor Gatherings: Because COVID-19 spreads easily and rapidly, the U.S. CDC has recommended "social distancing" — which means keeping your distance from other people, especially those most at risk of getting sick, including older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions. It is one of the most effective strategies to prevent community spread of coronavirus. In light of that guidance and upon the recommendation of the Coronavirus Response Team and the experts at the Maine CDC, Governor Mills is recommending the postponement of all non-essential large, indoor group gatherings in Maine of 250 or more attendees for the next 30 days.

Reducing the interaction of large groups of people now can delay an outbreak as well as substantially reduce its spread. Doing so will also reduce the strain on our health care system so that it can respond effectively to people diagnosed with the virus as well as other patients. Ultimately, organizers will decide for themselves the necessity of their events with the help of guidance issued by the Maine CDC and Maine people will decide for themselves the necessity of their attendance. This is not a recommendation to close schools. The Maine Department of Education continues to work closely with the Maine CDC and schools across Maine to help them prepare for COVID-19.

The Governor will re-evaluate this recommendation two weeks from now and adjust it based on the circumstances and up-to-date guidance from the U.S. CDC and Maine CDC guidance.

For more information on Maine's response to COVID-19 and updated testing results, visit the Maine CDC website. Additionally, Maine CDC and 211 Maine have launched a new option for Mainers to get answers to questions about COVID-19 at any time. This service is available by dialing 211 (or 1-866-811-5695), texting your ZIP code to 898-211, or emailing info@211maine.org.

The best thing that Maine people can do to protect their health is to take the same preventive measures that avoid catching a cold: Wash your hands often for 20 seconds. Cover coughs and sneezes. Stay home if you are sick. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, shortness of breath, and lower respiratory distress. Call ahead to a health care professional if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness. Health care providers will make the initial determination on whether COVID-19 testing is advisable. In cases where it is, medical

providers will alert the Maine CDC to coordinate testing. As appropriate, health providers will take samples and submit them to Maine CDC.

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