Governor Mills Convenes Coronavirus Response Team

March 2, 2020

Response team met today to build on Maine CDC's work in coordinating coronavirus preparation and response to protect public health

Governor Janet Mills today convened her Coronavirus Response Team charged with coordinating State government's response across departments and local agencies and health authorities to the potential spread of novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

The response team, led by Maine CDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah, briefed Governor Mills and the Cabinet regarding measures to protect public health and safety and to prevent spread of the virus should it occur in Maine. The response team will meet regularly to share information and coordinate coronavirus preparation and response across State government. Governor Mills also participated in a briefing today by Vice President Mike Pence, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and other federal officials for the nation's governors about the federal government's response to coronavirus.

Maine has no confirmed cases of COVID-19. As Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) previously reported, one individual in Maine who met federal requirements to be tested for the virus tested negative.

"While there are no cases of coronavirus in Maine as of today, and the risk to our state remains low, the State must be prepared to respond swiftly and effectively to any potential cases in Maine," said Governor Mills. "The Coronavirus Response Team, led by Dr. Shah, will build on our preparation and response efforts, coordinate across state government and ensure that we are taking every precaution necessary in partnership with local health officials, hospitals, school districts, municipalities and others to make sure Maine is fully prepared and to fully inform and protect all Maine people."

"The Maine CDC has been monitoring and preparing for COVID-19 since the virus was first identified in China in December 2019," said Dr. Shah. "Since then, more than 30 Maine CDC staff members have been focused on protecting the health of Maine people by updating safety protocols, upgrading the state lab so that testing can soon be performed here, and working closely with hospitals, medical providers, EMS, and other partners. As we keep working to minimize the risk of community spread, the best thing Maine people can do is take common sense steps to stay healthy, such as frequent hand washing."

In addition to Dr. Shah, the response team consists of commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services; Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management; Public Safety; Education; Corrections; Labor; Transportation; and Administrative and Financial Affairs. It also includes the Acting Director of the Maine Emergency Management Agency. Additional department and agency heads will participate as needed.

Maine CDC began preparedness and response efforts for COVID-19 in December 2019. The response team builds on the work that has already been done by the Maine CDC to prepare for potential cases of COVID-19. Maine CDC, which has been strengthened and revitalized over the past year under the Mills Administration, has dedicated dozens of staff to working on coronavirus preparedness and response, including:

- adjusting emergency response protocols to adapt to COVID-19;
- reviewing readiness plans to ensure state government maintains continuity of operations and services if COVID-19 impacts agency operations;
- hosting educational webinars for clinicians, infection control staff, and other health care professionals;
- 24-7 consultations with partners such as schools and public health departments to ensure they have information and resources;
- working closely with Maine's health care systems as they scale up preparedness efforts;
- communicating closely with school officials including recommending that they convene their school safety teams to review and update their Emergency Operations Plans responsive to pandemic flu and reminding schools that their plans should also include provisions to ensure continuity of education in the unlikely event of a closure;
- ensuring that potential cases will be rapidly identified and investigated and that isolation procedures are in place, if needed;
- increasing supplies of personal protective equipment for health care workers and first responders;
- updating lab equipment to enable testing for the coronavirus and engaging public health nurses as part of our emergency preparedness team, among other measures.

Maine CDC continues comprehensive planning to ensure Maine is ready should the virus affect people here and encourages Maine people to protect themselves by taking the same preventive measures that help to avoid catching a cold. These measures include:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue and then throwing the tissue in the trash.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water and use an alcohol-based sanitizer in between washings.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Staying home if you are sick.
- Taking care of your health overall by staying current on your vaccinations, including the flu vaccine, eating well, getting a good night's sleep, and exercising.

More information about COVID-19 can be found can be found on the Maine CDC's coronavirus website, which will continue to be updated as new information becomes available.

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