

Good Morning Colleagues:

Last evening MSDH reported the first case of COVID-19 identified in Mississippi. Although there is no evidence of ongoing community transmission, it is an indication that COVID-19 will be affecting our communities to varying degrees.

This is an event that we have anticipated for some time. MSDH and the state of Mississippi has been preparing for a pandemic respiratory virus for well over a decade. To minimize the impact, MSDH will be recommending additional strategies that:

- Protect vulnerable populations;
- Limit spread in the community; and
- Preserve the healthcare infrastructure so that we can care for our patients.

As background information:

- The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a virus that causes a febrile respiratory disease, similar to influenza.
- Many cases may have mild symptoms.
- Severe cases may occur, leading to respiratory failure and death, especially among older adults and those with chronic medical conditions.
- Severe illness in children seems extremely uncommon.
- The vast majority of people infected with COVID-19 will fully recover.
- The virus is spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets.
- There is no antiviral treatment or vaccine currently available for COVID-19.
- Testing for COVID-19 is available at the Mississippi State Department of Health Public Health Laboratory and commercial laboratories.

As individuals, we all need to:

- Wash hands frequently or use hand sanitizer.
- Clean high touch surfaces regularly with sanitizers.
- Stay home if ill (fever and cough).
- If you are ill - call your own doctor or provider for guidance (please call first).
- Prepare for the possibility that schools or day care centers may temporarily close.
- Limit visitation to older relatives or friends (especially in nursing homes).
- Avoid mass gatherings (> 250 people) if you can.
- Avoid unnecessary (non-urgent) air, bus or train travel.
- Stay informed - visit [www.healthhms.com/COVID-19](http://www.healthhms.com/COVID-19) for the latest updates and guidance.

As healthcare professionals, we need to:

- Take every measure to prevent transmission of COVID-19 in our facilities, by -

- Following CDC infection control guidelines  
[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Finfection-control.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Finfection-control.html) .
- Limiting or rescheduling non-essential outpatient visits (especially among older individuals or those with severe chronic illness).
- Preparing for the need to delay elective surgical procedures.
- Recognize that most febrile respiratory illnesses **ARE NOT** COVID-19 at this time. We must be sure to appropriately diagnose conditions before assuming COVID-19.
- Stay informed of the latest information.
- Be a source of calm and well-informed guidance to our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic is certain to cause: significant morbidity, mortality, social disruption and a strain on the healthcare system. With a steady and reasoned approach, the healthcare system in Mississippi can save lives and preserve other essential services for those with non-COVID-19 illnesses.

Thank you,

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State Health Officer