Nine Americans Die of Novel Coronavirus

As more cases arise, the CDC reminds the general public that immediate risk is still low.

March 3, 2020 By Alicia Green

Editor's note: This article has been updated to reflect the latest total number of cases as provided by the CDC.

The new coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has now infected 129 Americans across the United States and killed nine people in Washington, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports.

Eighty cases have been reported across the following 13 states: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington and Wisconsin. Globally, more than 90,000 people have been infected, and more than 3,100 have died, with the vast majority of deaths in China. The virus has reached every continent except Antarctica.

According to a CDC breakdown, 24 people contracted the virus through travel, 16 individuals got sick from person-to-person spread and 40 people are still being investigated to determine how they acquired the infection. Of the cases among citizens returned to the United States, 46 were passengers on the quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship, and three were Americans who had been in Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak in China.

The total number of cases includes both those confirmed and those presumed positive (which means tests conducted by a public health laboratory yielded positive results but are pending confirmatory CDC testing).

The potential public health threat posed by the novel coronavirus to the United States and globally is still very high. CDC officials note that more cases are likely to surface, but most Americans will have low immediate risk of exposure. The novel coronavirus is not currently widespread in the United States.

Those at highest risk of exposure are health care workers caring for patients with the virus, close contacts of persons with COVID-19 and travelers returning from affected international locations where community spread is being reported.

The CDC advises all Americans to practice proper hygiene and take preventive steps to safeguard against acquiring and transmitting infections, as it's also flu season. (The agency estimates there have been 18,000 to 46,000 flu deaths so far.)

According to the CDC, people should avoid close contact with those who are sick, stay home when ill and cover their faces when coughing or sneezing. In addition, folks should wash their hands often (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub) and avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, getting proper sleep and drinking plenty of fluids is also recommended.

Symptoms of the flu include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. These are not to be confused with the common symptoms of coronavirus, which are fever, cough and shortness of breath. (And remember, some folks with COVID-19 have been symptom-free). While flu symptoms usually come on suddenly, coronavirus symptoms can appear two to 14 days after exposure.

But surgical face masks are not the answer, CNN reports. U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams says they are not effective in preventing the general public from catching the virus. What's more, Adams warns that masks worn improperly could actually increase the spread of coronavirus, so masks are best used by health care providers.

For more coronavirus updates, visit the CDC and follow CNN's live updates. For related RH coronavirus coverage, click here. Also, check out the following links for more info on how coronavirus affects people with HIV and cancer.

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