



**Department of Health**

Three Capitol Hill  
Providence, RI 02908-5097

TTY: 711  
[www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov)

March 3, 2020

Dear Fellow Rhode Islanders:

As you have most likely heard through the news, Rhode Island has identified two presumptive positive cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), and a third person is being tested for COVID-19. The press releases the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) issued on March 1 with more detail about these cases can be found here:

[First Presumptive Positive Case of COVID-19 Identified at RIDOH's State Health Laboratories](#)  
[RIDOH Announces Second Presumptive Positive COVID-19 Case; Testing a Third Individual](#)

Rhode Island has been preparing for weeks to ensure that a structure is in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Rhode Island. Outreach to the people who were in direct contact with these individuals is in process to ensure that they understand the measures required, that they quarantine and self-monitor for 14 days, and that they remain in communication with a public health nurse.

The science continues to evolve and what we know about this virus is subject to change. However, the latest guidance from CDC is that risk of asymptomatic transmission is very low and if you are not exhibiting any symptoms there is no need for concern or to change your daily routine.

**It is important that we all remain informed and that we work together to prevent the spread of diseases.**

We recommend that Rhode Islanders take the same measures that healthcare providers recommend to prevent the spread of flu and other similar viruses:

- Get your flu shot and encourage the people around you to do the same.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.
- Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- **The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare**



State of Rhode Island

**professional recommends it and you have respiratory symptoms. It is important that we keep the supply of masks available for those who really need them (e.g., healthcare providers and those who are sick).**

- If you have recently traveled from an area with [widespread or ongoing community spread](#) of COVID-19 (as of March 2, China, Iran, Italy, Japan, South Korea) and you have symptoms of the disease (fever, cough, shortness of breath), reach out to your healthcare provider and call ahead before going to a healthcare facility. The healthcare provider or facility will work closely with RIDOH to determine the best course of action.
- For those who have traveled to an area with [widespread or ongoing community spread](#) (as of March 2, China, Iran, Italy, Japan, South Korea) recently and DO NOT have symptoms:
  - While there is no official guidance saying students are not permitted back into school
    - 1.) Individuals/families should always be monitoring for symptoms.
    - 2.) A school can work collaboratively with a family or they can mutually decide on how to keep their child at home while still providing that child an excellent education and also monitoring for symptoms. Similarly, schools can work collaboratively with faculty and staff on how to stay home while minimizing educational disruption.
- It is important that people know when to go to a hospital emergency department. Many types of illnesses and injuries do not require an emergency department visit. Going to an emergency department for something that could be treated by your primary care provider or at an urgent or express clinic will likely result in an extended wait.

RIDOH's mission is protecting and promoting the health and safety of Rhode Islanders. Informing you is an essential way in which we can try to ensure that everyone — in every community — can be as healthy as possible.

For the most up-to-date information about COVID-19, [visit RIDOH's website](#). If you cannot find the information you need on our web page, please call RIDOH's COVID-19 Information Line at 401-222-8022 Monday-Friday between 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. After those hours, the United Way's 2-1-1 call center can answer many frequently asked questions about the new coronavirus and can assist with many other situations 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We know that times of uncertainty can cause anxiety. If you are feeling anxious, please call the state's BH Link hotline 24/7 at 401-414-LINK.

As always, thank you for taking personal steps to protect yourself, your family, and your community.



Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH  
Director of Health



Angelica Infante-Green  
Commissioner of Education

