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New Orleans Health Department Prepares for Coronavirus; Threat Currently Low

NEW ORLEANS — While the risk of the general public contracting coronavirus in New Orleans is currently low, the New Orleans Health Department (NOHD) continues to prepare for COVID-19, the novel coronavirus discovered in China in December 2019. There are no cases of COVID-19 in Louisiana and 60 cases of COVID-19 in the United States, most of which are repatriated individuals from the Diamond Princess Cruise Ship. There is currently one case in California of unknown origin that could be the first caused by local community spread. Earlier this week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidance that the public and businesses should prepare for social distancing and other non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). While there is a chance that the risk level for COVID-19 could increase over time, the current threat remains low.

NOHD is coordinating directly with the Louisiana Department of Health and attends weekly calls with the CDC. All three organizations maintain infectious disease protocols and are currently reviewing and updating for the specifics of coronavirus.

"Our Emergency Preparedness team is trained to think about worst case scenarios and has developed plans so that we can respond to one case or hundreds of cases," said **Dr. Jennifer Avegno, Director of Health**. "While we have the authority to implement social distancing within New Orleans, we have no plans to do so at this time. The social distancing measures that CDC mentioned earlier this week are a possibility, but they would be implemented in a thoughtful, gradual manner based on the risk of disease transmission and under the guidance of state and federal health agencies."

NOHD provides regular updates to all New Orleans healthcare providers to ensure that healthcare systems are prepared to easily identify suspected cases, implement infection control procedures, and test and/or treat an individual if needed. The City is also working closely with the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY), Port of New Orleans, Coast Guard, and Customs and Border Patrol to review protocols and implement new federal guidelines for travelers. At this time, the federal government does not recommend screening at MSY and has rerouted all flights with passengers from China to one of the 11 airports where screening is currently taking place. The CDC and State Department have issued travel warnings for all countries where the community spread of the diseases is considered widespread. For more information on travel please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

"This is a rapidly changing situation and we advise that all New Orleanians look for updates from trusted sources including the World Health Organization, CDC, and state and local health departments. The best way to prepare for any respiratory illness is to stay at home when you are sick, cover your cough, and wash your hands," states Dr. Avegno.

If you have questions about the Coronavirus, please contact the Louisiana Office of Public Health Coronavirus General Information Line at 1-855-523-2652 from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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