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Social Services | Public Health | Mental Health

news release

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Second patient test 'indeterminate' for COVID-19

A second case of COVID-19 in Humboldt County has not been confirmed because the individual involved has tested "indeterminate" for the virus.

Humboldt County Health Officer Dr. Teresa Frankovich said, "Regardless, we are managing the second individual exactly the same as the confirmed case as we have from the start."

As announced last week, Humboldt County has one confirmed case of COVID-19 in a local resident. Both the positive and indeterminate sets of results were confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The ill individuals are doing well and continue to remain in isolation at home while being monitored for symptoms by the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services Public Health Branch Communicable Disease Surveillance and Control Unit.

Frankovich said home isolation is the preferred management approach for people who do not need hospital-level care. "It both conserves our health care resources and decreases the risk of exposures to health care workers, other patients and the community," she said.

As noted by the CDC, the potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the United States. The fact that this disease has caused illness, including illness resulting in death, and sustained person-to-person spread in some countries has health officials concerned.

Frankovich stated that there is much the scientific community does not yet know about this virus and how it behaves, but more is learned every day. "We do know that it can cause mild, flu-like symptoms in some people and severe respiratory symptoms in others. We also know that the risk of getting the infection is dependent on exposure. Due to the current limited number of cases in the U.S., the risk of exposure for the general public remains low at this time, according to the CDC.

Frankovich said, "Let's face it, going forward, the big question most of us in the U.S. have is, 'how worried do I need to be about this outbreak?' Unfortunately, the answer right now is not clear. Many factors determine how big an impact a new virus strain may have." The CDC says the most important are:

- 1) Clinical severity, or how serious is the illness associated with infection.

When an outbreak occurs, typically it is the most vulnerable individuals—those who are older or have a chronic disease—who become ill first. Only the sickest come to medical attention. This means that the people most likely to be counted are also the most likely to fare poorly, so initial death rates appear high. Frankovich said because of the speed at which COVID-19 unfolded in China, and the need to deal with the seriously ill first, it is likely there are thousands of individuals with only mild, cold-like symptoms who have never been included in case counts.

"Bottom line, to really know what percent of people who have the infection actually die from it, you need a pretty good idea of how many people actually had the infection," Frankovich said. "This information will become more clear over time and particularly as we are able to evaluate outcome information from additional countries, including our own."

- 2) Transmissibility, or how easily the pandemic virus spreads from person-to-person.

In China and some other countries, there is clearly transmission occurring at the community level. This means individuals who have no known exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19 have become ill. To date, this is not occurring in the U.S., but this will very likely change over time, according to the CDC.

- 3) And, finally, is there effective treatment or a vaccine to prevent the infection?

The CDC states that there is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. Scientists are working hard to change that situation, but it will take some time. Fortunately, Frankovich said our health care systems offer excellent supportive care for ill individuals. Anti-viral medication for use is also being investigated.

Right now, the approach of quarantining individuals with exposures and monitoring them for symptoms, as well as isolating individuals who are confirmed cases, is intended to slow the spread of illness in the U.S., Frankovich said. Slowing spread gives the scientific community time to study this infection and develop effective strategies for containing, treating and eventually preventing infection through vaccination.

"The world has become a much smaller place due to air travel which can take us across the planet in hours," Frankovich said. "COVID-19 is not the first and will not be the last new virus strain to emerge, and that is why continual surveillance for

emerging illnesses and maintaining or expanding our capacity to respond is so critical to the health and safety of our communities.”

For more information about COVID-19, please call Public Health during normal business hours at 707-445-6200, or visit Humboldt Health Alert at www.humboldt.gov/HumboldtHealthAlert.

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