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Local health officials assure residents that coronavirus plans are under way

Now that North Dakota has its first presumptive case of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), local health officials want to assure Valley City/Barnes County residents that they have been meeting with and/or communicating with the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDOH) regarding next steps. Local health facilities, area schools, VCSU health services, long-term care facilities and other entities have been included in these conversations as appropriate.

The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDOH) confirmed the state's first presumptive case of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in a Ward County resident on March 11, according to Gov. Doug Burgum.

"We have been planning and preparing for this since January, and our top priority remains the health, safety and well-being of all North Dakotans," Burgum said. "With the North Dakota Department of Health and its partners at the state, local and federal levels, we are working together to stay on top of this rapidly evolving situation."

"Individuals can help protect themselves from COVID-19 by practicing everyday preventative behaviors," reiterated Theresa Will, City-County Health District administrator. "Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands, limit exposure to ill people (if possible), wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content."

If you are sick, stay home. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, throw it in the trash and wash your hands, or cough/sneeze into your elbow, added Will. Everyone from individuals to businesses, health facilities to multi-unit living areas should clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on a daily basis, or more often if necessary.

Symptoms of COVID-19 in people who have been exposed can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you believe you may have been exposed to COVID-19, call your health care facility before coming in to see your provider.

"Not everyone will need to come into the clinic to be seen, depending on their symptoms," said Wendy Hager, clinic director at Sanford clinics in Valley City and Enderlin. "Call ahead to talk with a nurse to triage symptoms and the possibility of exposure based on history."

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends adults over the age of 60 and individuals with multiple underlying health conditions refrain from group activities. These individuals are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness. If you go out, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash hands often.

Local health facilities ask that people support decisions made by administrators to close or limit visitations at this time. "This is for the safety of patients and staff," said Will. "Please abide by these precautions to protect everyone's health."

For questions related to COVID-19, the public can call the NDDoH health hotline at 866-207- 2880 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. Individuals who need medical advice should contact their health care provider.

For the most updated and timely information and updates related to COVID-19, visit the NDDOH website at www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus , follow them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.