What’s on the Horizon for Public Health?

Stay Calm, Be Prepared, Wash Your Hands, Stay Informed

It is not too often that “What’s on the Horizon” talks about the same subject two months in a row. Coronavirus (COVID-19), however, warrants a closer look and an update. Public messages about every aspect of this viral illness are coming at us from every direction. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Horizon Public Health (HPH) are all working together to bring you the best information that is currently available in this quickly evolving situation.

Although much is still unknown about the virus, here are some things we do know:

- COVID-19 causes a viral respiratory illness, much like the common cold or influenza.
- The main symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath.
- COVID-19 is able to spread from person-to-person.
- The majority of people infected experience mild illness, some people will become seriously ill.

Protecting yourself from COVID-19 involves the same recommendations for avoiding many respiratory illnesses such as influenza and the common cold.

- Wash your hands often and thoroughly (20 seconds) with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.
- Stay home when you are sick, this is critical to avoid passing the virus to others around you.
- Cover your cough/sneeze into your elbow. If you use a tissue, throw it in the garbage and wash your hands. Don’t cover your cough with your hands!
- Don’t touch your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Regularly disinfect frequently touched surfaces like door knobs, light switches, remotes, etc.

You have heard the message from public health through the years, over and over, to prepare your family for an emergency situation. The federal website www.ready.gov has great checklists to help you consider steps you can take. We recommend that you take a look at your supplies to be prepared for being home for a couple of weeks if necessary. Food, water and medications are a great place to start, but remember if you go out and purchase more than what you need it creates empty store shelves for others. This is a time to be ready, but also remain calm in our approach.

Masks have flown off store shelves. Remember that masks are needed for healthcare workers and sick patients. They are not intended to protect healthy people in the community. The available supply needs to be for healthcare workers, so they are able to care for those who are critically ill. If you have respiratory symptoms and plan to seek medical care, please call ahead or check the organizations website for instructions.

To stay up to date on current information visit the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov. They are publishing the latest information and frequently making changes. There is information for business owners, schools, travelers and others who may be looking for specific guidance to help with planning and decision making. For information specific to Minnesota or what is happening here in our five Horizon counties visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us or Horizon Public Health at www.horizonpublichealth.org. If you have questions please call our main line at 320-763-6018. Remember, stay calm, be prepared and wash your hands often!

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