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PRESS RELEASE

**THE CORONAVIRUS MAY BE NOVEL, BUT PREPARING FOR A LOCAL OUTBREAK
ISN'T ANYTHING NEW FOR OCEAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

No Cases of COV-19 Reported At This Time, But OCHD & Community Partners are Wasting No Time Preparing

(Toms River) - The coronavirus took the world by surprise back in late 2019 and now the novel virus is making daily headlines as concerned New Jerseyans wait and speculate how it may impact us all should it spread to the Garden State. In the meantime, the Ocean County Health Department (OCHD) continues to prepare for all potential scenarios that may come its way.

"The OCHD has been closely monitoring the COVID-19 outbreak from day one and is working diligently with federal, state and local agencies to share information and offer guidance regarding response strategies. We are also in the process of putting together agency and community-wide task forces to assess and reinforce local readiness," explains Daniel Regenye, OCHD Public Health Coordinator. "On the county level, we've been in close communication with the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Ocean County Sheriff Michael G. Mastronardy, superintendent of schools, our faith-based leadership, local law enforcement and public health providers to keep lines of communication open as we move forward."

"The OCHD continues to receive up-to-date guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH)," adds Ocean County Freeholder Gerry P. Little, Liaison to the Ocean County Board of Health. The good news is that we learned so much from some of the recent emerging health issues such as Ebola, H1N1 and most recently, the measles outbreak last year. Emergency readiness plans are regularly being updated and modified in the event any unique or special issues arise."

Keeping the public informed is one of the top priorities for health officials as new information is coming out on a daily basis. Even though the risk is still low at this point, we know what kind of impact COV-19 can have should individuals start getting sick. Thirteen Ocean County residents that recently traveled to outbreak areas were being monitored by the Ocean County Health Department but none of them developed any symptoms and are cleared. Four additional Ocean County residents have been forwarded to Ocean County for follow up.

What public health officials know right now is that the coronavirus is believed to be less contagious than the measles - this can be an important advantage moving forward. Many of the established and recently exercised OCHD action plans and protocols in place for the recent measles outbreak and annual influenza season should help contain any spread and mitigate the impact of the virus in our communities.

"We would like to stress that preparedness begins at home. And while there isn't a vaccine and still so many unknowns surrounding COVID-19, the message is the same that we stressed during the recent measles outbreak and every flu season - and that's to take a common sense approach to prevent any spread of the virus by adhering to simple hand and respiratory hygiene," advises Patricia High, OCHD Assistant Public Health Coordinator.

A few simple tips to remember:

- Wash your hands with soap and water regularly, for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home if you are sick and avoid sick people.
- Clean and disinfect regularly.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Review and follow CDC travel advisories when planning travel. If you become ill after returning home to the United States, call your healthcare provider before going to a doctor's office or emergency department of a hospital. They may want to place a mask on you before you enter the building to protect other people.
- Get a flu shot - it's not too late to be protected. OCHD is offering FREE flu shots!

For up-to-date information on COVID-19, look for the link on the upper right of the OCHD website that leads you to the NJDOH COVID-19 page. Or, call their hotline available around the clock for questions at 1-800-222-1222. OCHD has also set up a hotline number for residents questions regarding the coronavirus. The number is 732-341-9700 ext. 7741.

Additional information can be found at:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/summary.html>
or New Jersey Department of Health website at:
<https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml> .

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