

Joint Media Statement from MercyOne New Hampton, Chickasaw County Public Health and Chickasaw County Emergency Management

Released at 2:15 p.m., Thursday, March 12, 2020

Healthcare providers and public entities in Chickasaw County, including MercyOne, Chickasaw County Public Health, care centers, schools and emergency services, are closely monitoring COVID-19 (2019 novel coronavirus) developments and following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). At a county level and as individual entities, there is frequent contact with communicable disease officials with the Iowa Department of Public Health and the CDC.

At this time (2:15 p.m., 3/12/2020), there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Chickasaw County. COVID-19 spreads like influenza does - primarily between people who are in close contact (within about six feet) by respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes and via direct contact with respiratory secretions. Patients are thought to be most contagious when symptomatic. It is estimated that about 80% of those who have COVID-19 will experience mild illness, which will not require medical help. Seniors and people with pre-existing heart and lung diseases have the greatest mortality risk with COVID-19.

If you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (fever, cough, or difficulty breathing), and have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or traveled to a location that has widespread COVID-19 you should contact your medical provider. Do not come to the hospital or clinic without calling first as COVID-19 is a highly contagious so you will be directed on where to enter the building so staff are prepared for your arrival.

There are many citizens worried about the spread of COVID-19 in Chickasaw County. All questions regarding COVID-19 should be directed to the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) by calling their hotline at 2-1-1. It is encouraged that everyone practices the following safety precautions:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Disinfect surfaces and objects using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe
- Stay home if you are sick

Wearing a mask is not advised by the CDC for protection against respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.

Several area healthcare facilities including MercyOne New Hampton, area healthcare organizations and care centers have implemented visitor restrictions. If you have a friend or family member receiving care in a health facility, please be aware of the restrictions in place before arriving at

the facility. There are also some cancellations of events in our area. The cancellation or postponement of events that include larger gatherings of people isn't to cause panic, rather the goal is to slow the spread of the virus in order to reduce the load on the country's health-care system.

With many people in the area returning from travel to different parts of the state, US or world, there are many questions regarding self-quarantine. When someone is quarantined, that doesn't mean they are infected with the coronavirus. Quarantines are meant to restrict the movement of people who may have been exposed to the contagious disease but haven't tested positive. The CDC characterizes exposure risk as high, medium and low.

- High exposure would be close contact with an infected person, such as a family member or a roommate.
- Medium exposure would be limited contact for a short period of time -- for example, spending an hour with someone in a classroom setting.
- Low exposure would be minimal contact — attending the same large conference as an infected person, for example.

The CDC recommends self-quarantine for medium- and high-risk exposure. Please call 2-1-1 if you question whether or not you should self-quarantine.

The outbreak of COVID-19 continues to be fluid and changing situation. While it is a priority to keep the public informed about updates in Chickasaw County, please understand that the #1 priority is to care for patients, protect their privacy and implement emergency preparedness plans. Again, if you have questions regarding COVID-19, please call the hotline that is staffed by the Iowa Department of Public Health at 2-1-1.