

MedChi Urges Reporting and Screening to Prevent Coronavirus Spread

BALTIMORE, January 25, 2020 – The Public Health and Emergency Preparedness Committees of MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, are recommending immediate action and increased awareness to prevent or at least slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Richard Bruno, MD, MPH, Family & Preventive Medicine Physician, and Chair of Public Health Committee, MedChi explained “We are seeing an accelerated spread of a novel coronavirus originating in Wuhan, China, and responsible for at least 42 known deaths since November 2019. As of Saturday January 25th there are two confirmed cases in the US (Seattle and Chicago), with more expected.” He went on to explain “Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that cause respiratory symptoms in animals and humans (about 5-10% of the common cold illness can be attributed to the coronavirus). However, the reproduction number (R0) of this new strain of the coronavirus may be higher than the 2002 SARS outbreak and the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, and it can be spread person-to-person before symptoms emerge.”

Kathleen Hough, MD, Emergency Physician, the Chair of MedChi’s Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee expressed concern stating “there is reason to believe this may be an airborne virus which can spread similarly to measles. For now, airborne and contact precautions should be used with suspected carriers who may have traveled from an endemic country (currently mainland China, Taiwan, and Thailand). This may also require quarantine of suspected carriers. There is no vaccine against coronavirus.”

Symptoms of coronavirus are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. It seems to be affecting those with chronic illness more severely than previously healthy people, but there have been multiple deaths of treating healthcare professionals.

MedChi's public health committee and emergency preparedness subcommittee are recommending screening patients for travel from endemic countries within the prior 14 days and implementing airborne and contact precautions. Clinicians should immediately report patients who meet the above criteria to their local health department. This is an evolving situation and MedChi will continue to inform our members of any critical updates.

- For an up to date incidence map, see the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health GIS map here: <http://www.tiny.cc/JHUnCoV>
- For CDC updates: <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>
- For Maryland Department of Health updates: <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>

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