



Last Updated: 3/12/2020

catawba county public health

CORONAVIRUS

There is an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a new type of coronavirus (COVID-19). Numbers of people affected worldwide have continued to climb over the past several weeks, and North Carolina now has cases in multiple communities. The most updated count for cases in North Carolina can be located here: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/covid-19-case-count-north-carolina>. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a global pandemic on 3/11/2020. North Carolina's Governor declared a State of Emergency on 3/10/2020. This is a rapidly evolving situation, and we anticipate there being more cases in the U.S. in coming weeks.

Current risk:

To protect individuals' privacy, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) will not publicly disclose the number of people being evaluated for the virus. Appropriate infection prevention measures will be taken if and when a person is under investigation. More information can be found on the DPH 2019-nCoV website, <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/2019nCoV.html>.

- The potential global public health threat posed by this virus is high, but right now, the immediate risk to most Americans is low, as most cases are still limited to mainland China.
- Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure or death.
- While severe illness, including illness resulting in a number of deaths has been reported, the majority of patients have had milder illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and WHO are still investigating to learn more about the risk of death from this coronavirus.
- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses (there are many strains), some causing illness in people.
- Clinicians should use standard, contact, and airborne precautions, and use eye protection. They should notify Public Health immediately if they suspect a case.

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People at increased risk of serious COVID-19 illness:

- Older adults and persons who have severe chronic medical conditions seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness.
- Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness. This may be because:
 - As people age, their immune systems change, making it harder for their body to fight off diseases and infection.
 - Many older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions that make it harder to cope with and recover from illness.
 - If you are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications due to age or a severe underlying medical condition, it is especially important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of exposure.

Prevention:

The steps to preventing coronavirus transmission are similar to the steps to preventing other respiratory illnesses, like the flu. The following are measures all North Carolinians can take to prepare for potential widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the state:

Individuals and communities should familiarize themselves with [recommendations to protect themselves and their community](#) from getting and spreading respiratory illnesses.

Individuals, Families and Communities

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, and for at least 20 seconds each time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not reuse tissue after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.
- It is also good practice to start being more aware of the number of times a day your hands touch an object or hard surface and then touch your face without being washed. Limiting the exposure of your nose, mouth and eyes to unwashed hands can help to protect from the spread of all germs and illnesses.
- Have a plan in case you need to miss work or other responsibilities due to personal illness or to care for a sick family member.
- For pregnant women and children, review the [information and guidance available on the CDC website](#).

Businesses and Employers

- Practice good hand hygiene and encourage your employees and patrons to take precautions to protect themselves from the spread of respiratory illnesses.
- Review your policies and procedures for remote or teleworking where possible.
- Cross-train employees for key functions so that daily schedules can continue relatively uninterrupted by potential employee absences.
- Review absenteeism policies to make sure employees are not being encouraged to come to work if they are sick.

- If you have not already, establish a relationship with your [local health department](#) and communicate with them if you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19.
- Look for more updates and [guidance for businesses available on the CDC website](#).

Health Care Providers and Hospitals

- Review policies and procedures for infection prevention and mitigation, and make sure that all employees are aware of and following the appropriate steps.
- Consider how to maximize the use of telemedicine, nurse triage lines and other options to prevent sick people from coming to clinics and emergency rooms if they have mild illness and do not need treatment.
- Continue implementing the [NCDHHS and CDC guidance for COVID-19](#) and continue working closely with your local health department and NCDHHS.
- Look for more updates and [information for health care professionals on the CDC website](#).

College, Universities, K-12 Schools and Child Care Facilities

- Make sure all students, faculty and staff are aware of and practicing good hand hygiene and taking precautions to protect from the spread of respiratory illnesses.
- Review absenteeism policies and procedures to make sure students or children, faculty and staff are not being encouraged to attend or work if they are sick.
- If you have not already, establish a relationship with your [local health department](#) and communicate with them if you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19.
- [Learn more about COVID-19 on the CDC website](#), and look for updates and information for schools, colleges and childcare.

Community Events or Mass Gatherings

- NCDHHS recommends that organizers of events that draw more than 100 people cancel, postpone or modify these events or offer online streaming services beginning March 13, 2020.
- These events include large gatherings where people are in close contact (less than 6 feet), such as concerts, conferences, sporting events, faith-based events and other large gatherings.
- [Learn more](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about planning mass gatherings or large community events.

Community and Faith-Based Organizations

- Community and faith-based organizations, whose members may include [high-risk populations](#), should plan for the possibility of a COVID-19 outbreak in their local communities.

Mass Transit

- Mass transit operators should maximize opportunities for cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces. People should avoid using mass transit (e.g. buses, trains) while sick.

Cleaning and Disinfection Guidance (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

NCDHHS Recommendations: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina/people-higher-risk>

No one group, ethnicity or population in the US is at a higher risk for acquiring COVID-19 infection than others. While some people may be worried or have concerns about COVID-19, it is important to not let fear and anxiety lead to social stigma towards friends, neighbors or members of the community. Treat all people with compassion and speak up if you hear others making statements that cause stigma against people in your community.

All North Carolinians can better prepare for COVID-19 by getting up-to-date information directly from reliable sources like the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus) and the CDC (cdc.gov/coronavirus). The COVID-19 outbreak has been accompanied by a global flood of misinformation from unreliable sources. Be thoughtful about what you read or hear about the virus and make sure you are separating rumor from fact before you act.

If you have questions or concerns, call the COVID-19 Helpline toll free at 1-866-462-3821. To submit questions online, go to www.ncpoisoncontrol.org and select “chat.”

Travel:

- There are currently no restrictions on domestic travel.
- The U.S. is actively screening incoming travelers at large international airports with CDC quarantine areas. Charlotte Douglas International Airport is not one of those airports with a quarantine area.
- Countries that have a Level 3 Travel Health Notice (widespread, ongoing transmission): China, Iran, Italy, South Korea
- People who have traveled in China, South Korea, Iran, Italy or Japan within the past two weeks and who develop fever, cough, or have difficulty breathing should seek medical care right away.
 - They should call ahead before going to the doctor or emergency room and tell the physician their symptoms and their travel dates.
- People who have traveled in areas with widespread, ongoing transmission should stay home for 14 days from the time they left an area with widespread, ongoing community spread (Level 3 Travel Health Notice countries) and practice social distancing.
- Public Health is responsible for facilitating self-monitoring of travelers who have been released from quarantine by the CDC. We will stay in communication with those individuals, set up a plan and will supervise the individual as they follow the plan during the 14-day self-monitoring period to identify any symptoms that may develop.

What we can all do:

- Keep things in perspective
 - Remind yourself that the number of confirmed infections in the U.S. is very low
 - Try to unplug from the media from time to time
- Get the facts – Find up-to-date and accurate information from a credible source like NC DHHS or CDC
- Communicate with your children – Discuss accurate and age-appropriate information to allay

fears and encourage compassion

- Keep connected
 - Maintain social networks to foster a sense of normality, provide outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress
 - Share useful information found on governmental websites with your friends and family
- Seek additional help
 - Consult with a trained and experienced mental health professional when feeling distressed
 - Support your friends, neighbors

Who to contact:

Questions from the Public: 1-866-462-3821, ncresponse@dhhs.nc.gov, or chat online at <https://www.ncpoisoncontrol.org/>

To Report a Possible Case: N.C. Communicable Disease Branch's Epi On Call at 919-733-3419 or Catawba County Public Health Communicable Disease Staff at 828-695-5800

Helpful links:

- The most up-to-date information for travelers and healthcare professionals can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.
- The most up-to-date travel information can be found here: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-wuhan-china>.
- State Department Travel: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/China.html>
- WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- North Carolina: <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/2019ncov.html>
- Guidance for healthcare settings can be found at <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/coronavirus/providers.html>.
- Information for non-healthcare settings is available at <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/coronavirus/nonhealthcare.html>.
- Information for businesses and employers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/guidance-business-response.html>
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/coronavirus/nCoV-FAQs_1_31_2020.pdf
- Fact Sheet: <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/coronavirus/nCoV-Factsheet.pdf>
- Case Map: <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

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