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**TO:** Public News Media Sources

**FROM:** Joel R. Strasz  
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**DATE:** **March 14, 2020**

**RE:** **Important and Practical Information for Bay County Residents Regarding Coronavirus  
(COVID-19)**

Yesterday, testing had identified Bay County's first presumptive positive case for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Now considered a pandemic outbreak, the virus COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified and causes a respiratory illness ranging from a mild cold-like illness to severe pneumonia. Studies of the virus suggest that more than 80% of people diagnosed with COVID-19 encounter mild symptoms and recover quickly. **However, the people who are most likely to have severe disease and complications from COVID-19 are older individuals (>60 years old) and those with other medical conditions like heart and lung disease or diabetes. This is especially important as Bay County has the highest percentage of persons over the age of 60 (26%) in the state of Michigan.**

COVID-19 symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, people should wash their hands, stay home when sick, avoid close contact with sick people, and disinfect commonly touched surfaces.

While the state of Michigan has prohibited public gatherings of more than 250 people and closed all K-12 school buildings until April 5<sup>th</sup>, **the Bay County Health Department strongly encourages that public meetings in the community over 100 people be cancelled or rescheduled for a later date. Furthermore to protect seniors and individuals with above mentioned chronic conditions, the Health Department also strongly encourages these individuals to avoid public gatherings for the time being.**

The Health Department is utilizing all of its available resources to work diligently with local health care providers, townships and cities, and community organizations to protect our citizens. We all need to do our part to fight the virus including frequent handwashing, maintaining social distances of six feet, avoiding large crowds and most importantly staying home when you are sick.

Here is practical information for Bay County Residents about the virus:

### **Understand how COVID-19 is spread**

If a person with the virus coughs or sneezes, their respiratory droplets are released into the air. People in close contact (within 6 feet or less) can get sick from coming into contact with the droplets. The virus also lives for a long time on surfaces like desks, keyboards, tables, and doorknobs when touched by someone who has the virus. If you touch those surfaces and fail to wash your hands and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes...you can get sick.

### **Practice basic personal prevention daily**

Wash your hands well (for at least 20 seconds with soap and water) and often! Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Keep your distance (six feet or more) from people, especially if they are sick. Clean regularly used surfaces in your home and office and stay home if you're sick.

### **Know the symptoms**

COVID-19 is different than the flu or a common cold. Symptoms are fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath. Runny noses and phlegmy coughs are more indicative of an upper respiratory infection.

### **Prepare well**

There is no need to stockpile supplies like toilet paper and hand sanitizer. Think about supplies you need for about 14 days and have enough food, water, medications, pet food, and diapers on hand. The Health Department also encourages residents to get COVID-19 information from reputable sources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov/COVID-19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID-19)), Michigan Department of Health and Human Services ([www.michigan.gov/coronavirus](http://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus)), or the Health Department ([www.baycounty-mi.gov/health/Coronavirus.aspx](http://www.baycounty-mi.gov/health/Coronavirus.aspx))

### **What to do if you or a loved one gets sick**

If you have a fever, cough or shortness of breath, especially if you have traveled someplace with COVID-19 or have come into contact with a person known to have the virus, contact your health care provider by phone for clinical guidance. Currently, no specific antiviral treatment is recommended for those who contract COVID-19, but people with it are treated to relieve symptoms. Severe cases may require hospitalization, but most people will be asked to self-quarantine at home. The Health Department strongly recommends that anyone experiencing mild symptoms stay home and NOT go to public places until they are free of fever and other symptoms for at least 48 hours. Give sick family members their own room if possible, and keep the door closed. Limit their contact with pets. Have them wear a mask if possible and use a separate bathroom, if possible. Have only one family member care for them.

### **Who is most vulnerable?**

From what the CDC and Health Department know about the disease so far, older adults and people who have serious, chronic medical conditions should take extra precautions to reduce their risk of being exposed. Those medical conditions might be heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, or a suppressed immune system.

### **With schools closed for 3 weeks, what should we do or NOT do with children?**

Most of the cancellations and postponements are creating social distancing – keeping large groups of people from infecting one another. Try to stay home, have fun, and avoid public places as much as possible.

### **Who needs to get tested?**

Physicians should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing).

### **Summary**

With Bay County's significant population of seniors and residents with chronic diseases, we all need to do our part to ensure appropriate social distancing and good hygiene to prevent disease spread such as:

- Staying home when symptomatic.
- Frequent hand washing with soap and water.
- Directing coughing and sneezing into a tissue or elbow.
- Frequent disinfection of commonly touched surfaces daily