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Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) – Wuhan, China

We have all been hearing a great deal lately about the novel Wuhan virus that has caused hundreds of cases and 26 deaths in and around Wuhan, China. This virus is in the same family (coronavirus) as those responsible for the SARS and MERS outbreaks of 2003 and 2012, as well as, simple common colds. Although the infection now appears to be transmitted from person to person, transmission so far, largely remains in China.

The Grand Traverse County Health Department is closely monitoring information regarding the Coronavirus and sharing information with medical providers, community partners and the public, as it becomes available. With only one case reported so far in the United States, there is very low risk that any of us will come in contact with this disease unless we happen to interact with someone just back from Wuhan. Of course this could change if this infection becomes a true epidemic.

Coronavirus infection is likely to be very much like influenza. Both are essentially respiratory infections. They enter the body through being breathed in through the nose or mouth or through nearby mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, or mouth. They can cause symptoms as mild as a cold, or a flu-like combination of fever, aches, and fatigue, or serious complications like pneumonia or sepsis. Neither flu viruses nor coronavirus can be killed by ordinary antibiotics, and even antiviral drugs were not very effective against either SARS or MERS. Coronaviruses are not usually as easily transmitted as is influenza, but the communicability of this new virus is not well known yet.

Precautions that can help us avoid the Wuhan virus are the same as those to avoid flu, and are good habits generally. They include:

- Frequent handwashing, for 20 seconds with soap.
- Cough hygiene – into a tissue when possible (throw it away immediately) or into your arm if necessary.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with those who are ill.
- Stay home yourself from work or school when ill.

In addition, the CDC has the following recommendations:

- If you traveled to China in the last 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:
 - Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
 - Not travel while sick.

It is natural and reasonable to be concerned about this new infection that is receiving such worldwide attention, but putting this into historical context may be reassuring. The SARS outbreak that originated in China in 2003 caused only 8 confirmed cases and no deaths in the United States. And the MERS outbreak from Saudi Arabia in 2012 resulted in 2 U.S. cases and no deaths. At this point, based on what we currently know, the risk is low for most US citizens who are not travelling to China to contract the virus.

For more information about the coronavirus, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

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