



March 11, 2020

Wash Your Hands!

2019 Novel Coronavirus

Every day, we hear additional statistics about more people who have been infected with the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) which causes the respiratory disease now called COVID-2019. We hear of U.S. colleges telling students to go home and not return after spring break. We hear of large meetings and conventions being cancelled. On Monday, Italy placed its 60 million residents under lockdown, as the number of cases of COVID-19 throughout the country continues to rise.

Many people are worried and wonder what to do, and question what will happen in the future. Beside worries about how the health of people will be affected, there are worries how this will affect businesses, workers, and the economy.

Some facts that we know so far, according to the CDC (please visit www.cdc.gov/COVID19 for up-to-date information): The virus that causes COVID-19 probably emerged from an animal source, but is now spreading from person to person. Part of the problem with this virus is that people may not feel sick or have any symptoms but still are contagious and could spread the virus even before they get very sick. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of: 1) fever, 2) cough, 3) shortness of breath. Some people can have severe complications such as pneumonia in both lungs, but there is no specific treatment yet.

How can we protect ourselves? Most importantly, let's listen to our public health officials for advice as this all changes and evolves rapidly. But, we can protect ourselves by avoiding close contact with people who are sick; avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; and wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

If you are sick, stay at home and call your doctor or clinic about what you should do. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash. At the very least, cough into your elbow. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

More tests for novel coronavirus will be becoming available, so it is hoped that clinics, hospitals and doctor's office will be able to test for the novel coronavirus just like they are able to test for the flu. But, call your doctor first to see if the test is available, and where you should go to get a test. And, put on a facemask before you enter any facility to decrease the chance that others would be infected. If you become very sick and must

call 911, let them know that you suspect you might have been exposed to the novel coronavirus and wear a facemask, if possible, before the ambulance comes.

It is difficult to know what will happen next. We have to take precautions and make preparations, but we have to balance this with the needs for everyday life. Preparation is key, but how do we manage the information overload, especially for children and teenagers? According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network:

- Focus on supporting children by encouraging them to ask questions and helping them understand the current situation.
- Talk about their feelings and validate these.
- Clarify misinformation or misunderstandings about how the virus is spread.
- Provide comfort and a bit of extra patience.

Teenagers' response to the reports may look like symptoms of anxiety or depression: apathy, agitation, sleep/appetite disturbance, intrusive thoughts, isolating from peers and loved ones, and avoiding/cutting school. It is recommended that parents respond with patience, tolerance, and reassurance. Encourage teens to continue with their routines, limit media exposure, and talk about what they have seen or heard, including at school.

Let's all be safe!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District