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STATE HEALTH OFFICER

TO: Businesses and Employers

FROM: Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H. 
State Health Officer

RE: Guidance for Novel Coronavirus, COVID-19

DATE: February 25, 2020

The 2019 novel coronavirus is a virus that causes a potentially severe respiratory disease, COVID-19. It was recently identified in China and is now being detected worldwide. The situation regarding COVID-19 continues to evolve rapidly. The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) considers an individual being anywhere in China, or a country with active community transmission within the previous 14 days, a risk factor for COVID-19. ADPH is communicating with travelers returning from China to provide guidance about limiting public interactions for 14 days, which is consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) current guidance for returning travelers. However, this is an evolving situation and more geographic areas may be added soon.

- Individuals returning from China or areas with active community transmission (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) may have been exposed to COVID-19 and must self-monitor symptoms for 14 days after leaving the affected area. Employees must contact ADPH Infectious Diseases & Outbreaks Division at 1-800-338-8374 immediately upon return to Alabama. Employees must be excluded from work for the duration of this monitoring period. They are asked to remain home and to avoid congregate group settings such as church, concerts, buses, etc. After the 14-day self-monitoring period, employees should return to work once ADPH provides notice to the individual indicating completion of the required monitoring period, upon request.

An employee who returns from an affected area who develops symptoms compatible with COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing within their 14-day monitoring period should take the following steps:

1. Separate themselves from others as much as possible. Immediately notify ADPH Infectious Diseases & Outbreaks Division at 1-800-338-8374.

Businesses and Employers

Page 2

February 25, 2020

2. If they experience an urgent health situation, seek medical care right away. Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell staff about recent travel and symptoms.
3. Restrict travel to private vehicle or medical transport (e.g., ambulance). No public transportation while sick.

Persons who become symptomatic will require written physician clearance to return to work. Additional guidance from CDC on returning travelers is available at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html.

It is important that employees without a history of travel or contact to a person with known COVID-19 take every day preventative actions:

- a. Stay home when sick.
 1. Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are asked to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).
 2. Seek immediate medical care if symptoms become severe, such as high fever or difficulty breathing.
- b. Encourage employees to use "respiratory etiquette" through education and provision of supplies.
 1. Cover cough with a tissue or sleeve. See CDC's Cover Your Cough page. (www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/actions-prevent-flu.htm).
 2. Provide adequate supplies within easy reach, including tissues and no-touch trash cans.
 3. Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.
 4. Separate employees from others until they can go home.
 5. Encourage flu vaccine for those who have not had it this season to reduce illnesses and absences from work (however, this will not prevent coronavirus illnesses).
 6. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
 7. Avoid touching face with unwashed hands.
 8. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

For additional information, please contact ADPH at (334) 206-5971 or visit the ADPH website at <http://alabamapublichealth.gov/infectiousdiseases/2019-coronavirus.html>.