



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Oxiris Barbot, MD  
Commissioner

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Dear Community Partner,

The New York City Health Department (Health Department) is closely monitoring the 2019 novel coronavirus (named by the World Health Organization as COVID-19). As a community partner, you play an important role in helping to keep New Yorkers safe and informed about the facts. To date, New York City has not identified any positive cases of COVID-19, and the risk to New Yorkers remains low. However, we want to ensure New Yorkers know that we are prepared to respond if the virus that causes COVID-19 is detected in the city.

**What is COVID-19?**

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that are common throughout the world. They cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses like pneumonia. Recently, a novel (new) coronavirus was detected in thousands of people worldwide, primarily in China. There is evidence that the infection can be spread person-to-person. A "novel coronavirus" is a strain that has not been previously found in humans. Infections with this new virus have been reported in other parts of the world, including the U.S.

**What is New York City doing to address COVID-19?**

The Health Department is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to identify people who may have been exposed to the virus, monitor potential cases, and engage health care providers, community partners, and the public. The situation is rapidly changing, as is our understanding of the virus that causes COVID-19. Visit the [Health Department's coronavirus page](#) or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's coronavirus page](#) for the latest information.

**How can you help?**

You can help keep our communities informed. It is important that we separate facts from fear, and guard against stigma and racism. There are a lot of social media posts and news reports that are not rooted in science and are offensive, demeaning, and racist. Please help us keep our communities focused on facts, not misinformation. Visit the Health Department's website to download and share our [fact sheet](#) ([繁體中文](#) | [简体中文](#) | [Español](#) | [한국어](#) | [Русский](#) | [Kreyòl ayisyen](#) | [বাংলা](#) | [Italiano](#) | [Polski](#) | [العربية](#) | [יידיש](#) | [Français](#) | [اردو](#)).

The Health Department also encourages all New Yorkers to practice the same precautions that they would during any cold and flu season. You should still get your flu vaccine if you haven't yet — it's not too late. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve, not your hands. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. If you feel sick, stay home. And do not touch your face with unwashed hands. Help promote these messages by displaying posters from the Health Department. You can order free copies by calling **311**, or visit [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](#) to print on your own.

At this time, New Yorkers **do not need to**: limit travel within the city, change where they purchase food or how they prepare it, or avoid public gatherings and public transportation. The Health Department does not recommend wearing a face mask if you are healthy. Face masks are only recommended if directed by a health care provider, though it is important to respect our neighbors who choose to wear them.

If you were recently in China and have a fever, cough or shortness of breath, call your health care provider immediately. Hospital staff will not ask about immigration status and medical care is not a "public benefit" under the public charge test. If a member of your community does not have a doctor or insurance, they can visit an [NYC Health + Hospitals](#) facility.

**Want to stay connected to the City's response?**

Email [communityaffairs@health.nyc.gov](mailto:communityaffairs@health.nyc.gov) and let them know that you would like to stay connected. Questions can also be directed to that email. Thank you for all the work you do in your communities and for your dedication to promoting and protecting the health of all New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing to serve New Yorkers alongside you.

Sincerely,

Oxiris Barbot, MD  
Commissioner  
New York City Department of  
Health and Mental Hygiene