

**Ministry of Health**

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Dear Health System Partners,

I am writing to share information with you about the World Health Organization's [announcement](#) (WHO's) yesterday, of the identification of a new (or novel) coronavirus in China.

This new virus was identified as part of the investigation of a cluster of 59 people in Wuhan, China that presented with viral pneumonia of unknown origin over the past few weeks. These laboratory findings are preliminary, and more investigation is needed to understand the epidemiology of the virus. Persons under investigation (PUIs) associated with this cluster have also been identified in neighbouring countries/ autonomous regions (Hong Kong, Thailand, South Korea) and these individuals had reported travel history to Wuhan.

Together with Public Health Ontario (PHO) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), we have been monitoring this cluster closely since it emerged over the holidays. The identification of a novel coronavirus is a key step in understanding this outbreak. Other important features of the outbreak to date include that:

- Cases have been identified in a discrete geographic region (Wuhan, China), and there are additional PUIs among returned travellers from Wuhan, China to other regions and countries (Hong Kong, Thailand, South Korea).
- The initial reports link many cases to a seafood market in Wuhan, which has since been closed and cleaned.
- No deaths have been associated with the cluster in Wuhan, and many patients have been discharged from hospital.
- No significant human-to-human transmission has been documented.
- No cases have been reported in health care workers.

Given what is known at the present, the risk of infection with the novel coronavirus to Ontario and to Ontarians is low.

Readiness

As this outbreak evolves, we must be ready to respond should a person present to a hospital in Ontario with symptoms consistent with the novel virus and travel history to Wuhan, China. As such, we are asking the following:

- Hospitals/ Health Care Workers should identify patients with (a) fever and acute respiratory illness OR pneumonia AND (b) who have travelled to the city of **Wuhan, China** within 14 days prior to the onset of illness.
- Hospitals should immediately notify their Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) departments and the Ministry of Health (1-866-212-2272) of a PUI without disclosing Personal Health Information.

- In addition to Routine Practices which are in place as part of core readiness during respiratory pathogen season, PUIs should be placed on Droplet/Contact Precautions in a single room and preferably with negative pressure. N95 Respirators should be worn for aerosol-generating procedures and during the collection of laboratory specimens.
- Hospitals should refer to [PHO Laboratory Wuhan Novel Coronavirus Test Information Sheet](#) for information on recommended laboratory testing for PUIs.

This preliminary case description has also been shared through the electronic triage system (eCTAS) for hospital facilities that have implemented the application. More detailed testing information is available on PHO's [website](#).

Pending specific guidance, health care workers and organizations may refer to resources developed for the management of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome – Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) on the ministry's [website](#) to assess their current readiness. Guidance will be updated as the situation evolves, and we will share any updates with you directly.

If hospitals identify a PUI, they will have access to additional clinical expertise and emergency management support through the Ministry of Health and PHO.

Health sector partners are encouraged to contact the Health System Emergency Management Branch at 1-866-212-2272 (24/7) or during business hours at [eocooperations.moh@ontario.ca](mailto:eocooperations.moh@ontario.ca) if they have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your support and commitment to the health of Ontarians

#### Key Resources

- [Routine Practices and Additional Precautions](#)
- [Baseline Requirements for Infectious Disease Threats](#)
- [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome – Coronavirus \(MERS-CoV\)](#)
- [PHO Laboratory Wuhan Novel Coronavirus Test Information Sheet](#)

Yours truly,

*Original signed by*

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c: Peter Donnelly, President and Chief Executive Officer, Public Health Ontario