

Health Bulletin – Tuesday, March 10th

This year, in addition to the seasonal flu, we have an added concern with the advent of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19), a particularly virulent and serious strain of coronavirus which has not yet been adequately researched, and thus for which there are no specific treatments and limited diagnostic tests available to date.

As media attention and concerns about the coronavirus mount, we wanted to reach out to the Tree of Life community to provide you with the most up-to-date guidance and information we have received from the Vermont Department of Health, and to offer you some additional recommendations.

We are taking guidance from health authorities and want to pass along the most vital and up-to-date information we have to offer.

Although there are few confirmed cases of this illness in Vermont, the Department of Health has issued (and asked health-care providers to pass along) the following recommendations:

NEW ADVISORY: Following new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, returning travelers whose last day in China, Italy, South Korea or Iran was March 4 or afterwards **should stay home** and monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the United States. Travelers returning from Japan should monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the United States.

All Vermont travelers who have returned from those countries in the last 14 days should **call the Health Department at 802-863-7240**. The Health Department will be in regular contact with you for 14 days since the day you left the affected area to monitor you for symptoms of shortness of breath, cough or fever. If you develop these symptoms, contact your health care provider right away.

Note that according to the latest information we've received from the Department of Health, testing will be very limited, with very strict protocols and is only going to be available to those patients who are experiencing severe symptoms which meet specific criteria regarding onset and duration. **All patients who suspect they might be contagious should stay home and contact Tree of Life by phone rather than come to the clinic.**

The Vermont Department of Health has instructed Tree of Life Medicine to coordinate with local-area emergency department personnel to arrange to send at-risk patients (meeting the criteria above) to their facilities where testing will be performed in specified, contained areas. Because of the high risk of contagion,

testing for COVID-19 must be conducted by personnel who will have the necessary training, tools and personal protective gear.

What this means for you:

Because we are not able to offer testing or collect samples here at the clinic, Tree of Life Medicine will be triaging all patients over the phone.

If you are a primary care patient of the clinic concerned that you might have the flu or COVID-19, please observe the following protocols:

- 1) Call the clinic and report your symptoms to a member of the office staff.
- 2) If needed, a phone consult with a medical practitioner will be arranged.
- 3) Depending on the severity and duration of your symptoms, your provider may order testing, prescribe medications, and offer appropriate guidance over the phone.
- 4) If your provider deems it prudent for you to be tested at one of the local Emergency Departments, we will call ahead to inform them that you are coming.

Because there are no specific treatments or vaccines for this viral strain your best defense is prevention and self-care!

If you are feeling unwell take the following steps and precautions to minimize risk to yourself and others:

- Stay at home and rest!*
- Hydrate (drink lots of fluids)!
- Manage high fevers with Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil)
- If your illness is severe, call us as indicated above so we can evaluate your illness and provide more guidance on where to seek higher levels of care if warranted.

*Preventing spread of the virus is a high priority at this time. The advice here is no different than what we have learned about the cold and flu seasons in general when one is symptomatic. If you do need to leave the house, please wear a mask to avoid sharing germs via sneezing, sniffing or blowing!

Some Department of Health Recommendations for prevention are as follows:

- Frequently wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or a tissue, not your hands.
- Stay home when you're sick, especially with a fever.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

From the perspective of Tree of Life's providers, we would add the following:

*Eat wholesome, nutritious foods, and avoid sugar, overly refined foods and alcohol in general. Include cultured/lacto-fermented foods and drinks to maintain a healthy microbiome.

*Consider taking immune enhancing herbs and vitamins. A few common ones are garlic, elderberry, echinacea, North American ginseng, licorice, oregano oil, zinc, vitamin D, vitamin C, mushroom immune complexes, probiotics, and many others.

*Be sure to get adequate sleep, as much as possible. Try not to get too depleted.

*Fresh air and sunshine are beneficial in general, and good indoor air quality, too.

*Moderate exercise is beneficial.

*Try to stay in a positive frame of mind. Use stress reduction and mindfulness techniques that work for you, frequently.

*If you smoke, work on quitting or reducing this as it makes the lungs more vulnerable to illness.

If you think you might have been exposed to the virus or have other concerns about exposure, please call your State Health department.

Vermont Department of Health: (802)863-7240

Finally, while we know the news about coronavirus is scary, it's important that we avoid panic while acting prudently. More will be known about the whole situation, day by day, helping to allay unfounded fears that form in the absence of solid facts, and hopefully providing better and better guidance about how to avoid and treat this illness.

Part of the concern is that not enough is known about the new coronavirus, and unlike the seasonal flu, researchers don't know what to expect.

As of right now, there have been 647 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the US and 26 deaths. As with all flu-like illnesses, people with underlying immune deficiencies, chronic illness and the elderly are at greatest risk.

Prevention and good hygiene are key. So, please take good care of yourselves and your loved ones.