

January 31, 2020

UPDATED Guidance for Clinicians to Report Possible Cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)- GUIDANCE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS OUTBREAK UNFOLDS

Summary

- An expanding global outbreak of respiratory infections due to a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is being closely monitored by the WHO, CDC, and state public health officials.
- As of January 31, there have been thousands of confirmed human infections with nCoV in China with a growing number of cases in other international locations, including the United States.
- Clinical presentation varies from mild illness to severe or fatal illness. Symptoms include fever and signs of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); case-patients can also develop pneumonia and some reports suggest the potential for clinical deterioration during the second week of illness although the full spectrum of clinical illness remains unknown.
- Screening of incoming travelers from China is being conducted at numerous airports in the U.S. Active monitoring of travelers returning from China is not currently being conducted.
- Clinicians who suspect 2019-nCoV infection in a patient should report them **immediately** to the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) at 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584) and ask for a Medical Epidemiologist.

Background

An outbreak of pneumonia due to infection with a novel coronavirus (nCoV) began in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Since then, Chinese health authorities have confirmed thousands of infections with increasing deaths. Initially patients had epidemiologic links to a large seafood and animal market suggesting a zoonotic origin of the virus, but spread is now driven by person-to-person transmission, thought to be primarily via droplets from coughing and sneezing. Exported cases have been found in numerous countries outside of China, also with subsequent person-to-person spread, including in the United States.

To detect possible cases of nCoV infection early and prevent further spread, the United States is actively screening incoming travelers from China at numerous airports, including Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta. Health screenings (for fever primarily) will occur at the airport for anyone arriving from China. Travelers that are not symptomatic will be given further instruction on how to proceed if they develop symptoms while in the country. Active monitoring of these travelers is not being conducted.

CDC issued a level 3 travel health notice (“avoid nonessential travel”) for China (<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/watch/novel-coronavirus-china>). The US State Department issued a level 4 travel advisory (“do not travel”) for China (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/china-travel-advisory.html>).

Recommendations for Clinicians

1. Obtain a detailed travel history for any patients being evaluated with fever and acute respiratory illness. The Travel Clinical Assistant (TCA) can help identify current outbreaks and endemic diseases of concern around the globe. (<https://dph.georgia.gov/TravelClinicalAssistant>).

2. Patients who meet the following criteria should be considered a **patient under investigation** (PUI) for novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection. Note that this information will be updated frequently, most current PUI criteria can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/clinical-criteria.html>:
 1. Fever **AND** Lower respiratory symptoms **AND** Severe enough symptoms to require hospitalization **AND** travel to mainland **China** within 14 days of symptom onset.
 2. Fever **AND** Lower respiratory symptoms **AND** Doesn't require hospitalization but has been to **Hubei province** within 14 days of symptom onset.
 3. Fever **OR** Lower respiratory symptoms **AND** Any person, including healthcare workers, with close contact with a laboratory-confirmed 2019-nCoV patient within 14 days of symptom onset.
4. Appropriate PPE should immediately be utilized by the patient and healthcare professional if the patient meets the PUI criteria. Due to undetermined transmission dynamics, CDC recommends a cautious approach to PUIs. Such patients should be asked to wear a surgical mask as soon as they are identified and be evaluated in a private room with the door closed, ideally an airborne infection isolation room, if available. Healthcare personnel entering the room should use standard precautions, contact precautions, airborne precautions, and use eye protection (e.g., goggles or a face shield).
5. Once PPE is in place, immediately notify both infection control personnel at your facility and DPH at 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584) in the event of a PUI. Be sure to ask for a DPH Medical Epidemiologist. DPH will coordinate risk assessment and, if warranted, laboratory testing at CDC. **Case-patients must meet the PUI criteria to warrant laboratory testing for nCoV.** For guidance about collection, handling, and testing of clinical specimens, click here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>. Currently, laboratory testing of clinical samples can only occur at CDC. If approved for testing, specimens will be sent by healthcare facilities first to the Georgia Public Health Laboratory and then to CDC. DPH will coordinate sample transport.
6. Any hospital with a negative pressure room in the ED can assess these patients. If the patient meets the PUI criteria and is at a facility without a negative pressure room, then place the appropriate PPE on the patient as discussed in step 4 and call 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584) and ask to speak to a Medical Epidemiologist. They will assist you in determining if the patient needs to be transferred and how that will be accomplished.
7. If you have any questions about a PUI, please call 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584) and ask for a Medical Epidemiologist.

For more information

- Georgia Department of Public Health guidance: <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>
- CDC's guidance for healthcare professionals: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/guidance-hcp.html>
- CDC's guidance for hospitals or healthcare professional preparing for patients with suspect or confirmed 2019-nCoV: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/preparedness-checklists.html>
- For the latest CDC updates on the outbreak: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- CDC's guidance for isolation precautions: <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/isolation/index.html>

Clinicians who become aware of cases like those described above should report them immediately to 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584) and ask for a Medical Epidemiologist.