



Slowing the Spread of COVID-19 in OUR COMMUNITY

PLEASE NOTE THIS IS A “LIVING DOCUMENT” (REV. 3/18/19)

Basic Information on COVID-19 in Western New York

COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. While there are other types of coronaviruses that humans have dealt with (often as a common cold), this particular coronavirus is **completely new to the human population**. This means we do not have antibodies built up to defend against it.

It is spread **through people in close contact with each other** (within about 6 feet, or the length of an average couch) through respiratory droplets (spit and snot) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Someone may also get the virus from touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Remember, someone who has the virus may not know it. **A person can have the virus and have no symptoms for about 5 days and sometimes up to 14 days. They are able to transmit the virus during this whole time before they know they have it.**

Most common symptoms reported so far are a mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Patients can experience more severe complications from this virus in the form of pneumonia in both lungs, multi-organ failure and, in some cases, death. Those who are more at risk of severe complications include the elderly and people with medical issues like hypertension, diseases of the lungs, and diabetes. **Even though you may not be in a risk category, you can be a carrier of the virus and put other people at risk.**

What can you do on your own?

To avoid exposure to the virus OR sharing it (remember you could be infected and not have symptoms) is to:

- wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds (soap completely breaks down the virus)
- avoid touching your face
- sneeze or cough into a tissue or your elbow and
- **socially distance yourself and your family from others**

Social distancing means staying home from work, the store, school, and **any unnecessary outings**.

- When you must go out, **maintain at least 6 feet (the length of an average couch) between you and others**.
- Even though many of us are home from work and school, this is **not a good time to get together in the same physical space**. We must make a community effort to avoid direct contact with other people to slow the spread of the virus. For many in our community, this is a life or death situation.

Check on others in your community. Call, text, or connect through social media. If you are providing supplies to a neighbor or loved one, arrange to leave on the porch, use hand sanitizer before and after handling bags and advise your loved one or neighbor to do the same, particularly if they are higher risk (elderly or have hypertension, diabetes, asthma or other diseases impacting the immune system).

Secure sufficient prescriptions. If you take medication regularly, work with your health care provider to secure an adequate supply to avoid frequent trips to the pharmacy.

Establish a routine that includes physical activity and fun. If you are not accustomed to working from home and/or caring for young children during the week, try to establish a routine. Make sure to include breaks for outside time. Parks are still open in Western New York, just not the facilities within those parks. Avoid contact with surfaces like playground equipment, bring a ball from home or ride bikes instead.

More information at the Erie County Department of Health website: <http://www.erie.gov/covid19>

- **As of 3/18/2020 there were 20 diagnosed cases in Western New York.** This number is constantly increasing. There are many others in quarantine due to possible exposure and/or awaiting test results, and likely many more people in the community carrying the virus that may or may not have symptoms.
- While there is still limited testing ability in the region, it will expand as more test kits become available. **In order to be tested, one must contact their primary care provider or an urgent care BY PHONE.** They will ask several questions to determine the likelihood of your exposure and the nature of your symptoms. If they determine that there is a high likelihood you could have been exposed or that you have symptoms that closely match what they have seen, you will be referred for testing and they will provide instructions.

Clean frequently touched surfaces regularly. This includes doorknobs, refrigerators, countertops, faucets . . . anywhere that is frequently touched.

What can you do as an organization?

- **Establish organization-wide policies/procedures for working from home.** If work is largely completed in front of a computer and employees have the appropriate tools to work from home, allow them to. Shift as much work to telephone and web as possible, i.e. telemedicine, “home visits” by phone/web, previously scheduled in-person meetings to phone/web platforms, etc.
- **Prioritize the services for your most vulnerable clients/community members.** Have a “skeleton crew” of frontline workers to provide in-person services as they are absolutely required.
- **For frontline workers or those in a service industry, provide ample resources to practice good hygiene.** This means hand sanitizer, gloves, masks, adequate break time, ample soap and paper towels or dryers in bathrooms, and more frequent cleaning of high traffic areas.
- **Structure necessary interactions with clients/community members so that contact is minimized,** such as drive throughs, setting up multiple pick up locations throughout the community and several receiving stations within a location, prop open doors to limit use of shared door handles, extend hours of service if possible so people can spread out, use signage asking people to wait in lines with 6 feet between each other, and so on.
- **Make sure to offer resources for staff self-care.** This can be a stressful time for workers. Have a plan to support mental, emotional and behavioral health. Show gratitude to staff and create open lines of communication to allow for workers to ask for and receive support.
- **Communicate, collaborate and coordinate with other organizations.** We can do this together!

What can we do as a community?

- **Containment and response to COVID-19 is an act of community solidarity.** This is a team effort and we can work together to protect our healthcare and frontline workers (i.e. those in childcare centers, grocery stores and pharmacies) and our most vulnerable friends, family, and neighbors (seniors, those with underlying health issues).
- **Organize your community and discuss what you might be able to do for each other and others.** If you are already connected to a community, faith-based or neighborhood group, have a plan so that you can mobilize if/when needed to help each other and vulnerable community members. Call 211 to get information on resources for community members in need.
- **Use new and creative platforms to help each other.** We understand many people are ready and willing to volunteer, but we must do so safely and try to have limited physical contact with each other. [Buffalo Mutual Aid](#) is a grassroots network supporting information and resource sharing (click on link for shared document, or find on Facebook.) Freeconferencecall.com allows for quick, free, easy setup of conference calls. Zoom, WebEx, GoToMeeting, etc. offer web-based and interactive platforms for meetings to shift from in-person to virtual.

What can systems/institutions do?

- **County, state and federal health agencies are providing regular updates on the spread of the virus** as well as the ways that cities, counties, and states are combatting it. Get your information from reliable sources, and do not rely on social media. Local testing protocols are posted at <http://www.erie.gov/covid19>.
- **School districts should and have followed the guidance of county departments of health, scientists and physicians.** Superintendents have closed schools until at least April 20th and are putting resources in place to ensure that children have access to food, learning and school supplies, and other needed resources during this extended home-stay period.
- **Local, state and national policy makers can work to shift systems to meet urgent and critical needs.** Action is already being taken, and advocates can raise issues with policy makers as they arise. The city has enacted a number of measures in response to the virus: <https://www.buffalony.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=525> New York State has eliminated wait times for unemployment insurance and stopped eviction hearings. There are national policy changes for which we need to advocate, i.e. everyone who needs healthcare MUST get it (in line with these [recommendations from Health Affairs](#) for a COVID-19 stimulus bill.)
- **Foundations can provide rapid deployment of flexible dollars and resources to help nonprofit organizations meet these needs.** Health, human services and community-based nonprofit organizations are uniquely positioned and in urgent need of financial support and resources to help our community.