

Daily Update on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) March 8, 2020

New information is in red.

Current Status in Vermont

The Health Department is closely monitoring the developments in the outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus ("COVID-19"). Vermont is prepared to respond to protect and support Vermonters.

On the evening of March 7, 2020, health officials **announced** the first case of COVID-19 in Vermont. Officials are awaiting confirmation of the presumptive positive test result by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The adult patient is a Bennington County resident, currently hospitalized and in an airborne infection isolation room at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center.

This morning, Governor Phil Scott, along with Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD, Agency of Human Services Secretary Mike Smith and Deputy Public Safety Commissioner Christopher Herrick held a press conference at the State Emergency Operations Center to update Vermonters about this first case and of state preparedness and response efforts.

- For full audio (via vpr.org) of today's press conference on Vermont's first COVID-19 case, visit: <https://cpa.ds.npr.org/vpr/audio/2020/03/vpr-news-coronavrius-press-conference-20200308.mp3>
- For video (in four parts, via WCAX), visit: <https://www.wcax.com/content/news/COVID-19-568607941.html>

Public health epidemiologists are working to investigate possible travel or exposure history and to identify anyone who had close contact with the person. Those individuals will be assessed for their exposure risk and provided with guidance for their health. Where appropriate, they will receive recommendations for self-isolation or other restrictions.

We are also talking with the staff at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center to ensure they are properly cared for and protected, so that other patients are also protected.

We expect, and are prepared for, more cases in Vermont, and are taking every action to limit the spread of illness.

In addition to protecting a patient's personal health information, state health and public safety officials are committed to ensuring that Vermonters are aware of any risk to themselves and their community. This is the essential work of public health. We will contact anyone identified as at-risk as part of any case investigation, and recommend they stay home for 14 days or follow other restrictions as needed.

Actionable information for individuals, schools, organizations, businesses and others will be shared quickly to protect the health of Vermonters and prevent the spread of disease.

Anyone who feels ill or has concerns about their health should call their health care provider.

For the most up-to-date information and guidance about COVID-19, including from the CDC, visit healthvermont.gov/covid19.

As of 1:00 p.m. on March 8, 2020:

Vermont cases of COVID-19	1
Vermont cases of COVID-19 requiring hospitalization	1
Vermonters tested negative for COVID-19	28
Vermonters being monitored	224
Vermonters who have completed monitoring	23

Update on Cost Sharing for Testing

- Governor Phil Scott announced on March 6 that the State will ensure that anyone who meets the medical requirements for testing for COVID-19 can do so at no cost. These actions will help ensure that the cost of testing for COVID-19 will not be a concern, if the test is determined to be medically necessary.
- To make sure tests that are determined to be medically necessary are free, the Department of Financial Regulation will issue an emergency bulletin requiring Vermont health insurers to waive any out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 testing including testing during emergency room, urgent care, and office visits.
- Similarly, no cost-sharing will be applied to COVID-19 testing for Medicaid members. And the cost of testing for anyone who is uninsured will also be absorbed by state government. Only about 3% of Vermonters do not have health care coverage.
- Earlier this week, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) also announced that those receiving health insurance through Medicare are eligible for medically necessary COVID-19 testing at no cost.

Containment and Prevention Measures

- **We expect there will be more cases of COVID-19 in the state.** Vermont Health Officials urge Vermonters to stay informed and take all necessary precautions.
- 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 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.
- Vermont is currently working with New Hampshire in response to a New Hampshire case with close proximity to Vermont. Read more here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/media/newsroom/vt-and-nh-health-officials-working-together-trace-contacts-nh-covid-19-case> and here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/HS-COVID19-March-4-update.pdf>.
- Since the virus first emerged, the Vermont Health Department has been in constant contact with CDC and other states to closely monitor developments, and work to minimize the spread of illness. State government has been advising health care providers, schools, emergency responders on the latest information and preventive measures, and providing guidance and updates on the website and through the news media. This is a quickly evolving situation with new information guiding actions on an ongoing basis. Staff across the Department of Health are working in the Health Operations Center to adjust our response as appropriate to the situation in Vermont.
- Epidemiologists and public health nurses have been following CDC protocols for monitoring people who have recently returned from travel to affected areas (which includes China, South Korea, Iran, Italy, and Japan as of March 6). Monitoring means checking their temperature daily, watching for symptoms, and for some people, staying home.
- The Vermont Department of Health has compiled helpful guidance on how to help keep respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 from spreading, travel information and situation updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This can all be found at [healthvermont.gov/COVID-19](https://www.healthvermont.gov/COVID-19).
- Last week (week of February 24), the CDC made testing kits available to the states, and this week (week of March 1), the Health Department Laboratory began testing for COVID-19.
- At the direction of Governor Phil Scott, Vermont Emergency Management assembled an interagency task force to support the overall public health response and further prepare for the likelihood of COVID-19 cases in Vermont. This task force is focused on forward-looking, situation-specific mitigation planning, while the Vermont Department of Health continues its containment strategy in response to the current situation.

- The Health Department is working to strengthen protections for older Vermonters, including developing screening questions for visitors to long-term care facilities to identify anyone at risk. These have been made available for hospitals or other health care facilities.

Guidance for Vermonters

Guidance for Travelers Returning to Vermont from an Affected Area

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, 2020 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 travelers who have returned from those countries in the last 14 days should call the Health Department at 802-863-7240 to discuss monitoring for symptoms of shortness of breath, cough or fever. If you develop these symptoms, contact your health care provider right away.

Everyday Preventive Measures

Person-to-person spread of the virus is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Much is still unknown about how the virus spreads. Take these everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of germs:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Additional Resources

The Vermont Department of Health website contains guidance and answers to frequently asked questions, including:

- What does monitoring mean?
- How can I protect myself?
- Should I wear a face mask when I go out in public?
- Guidance for travelers returning to Vermont from an affected area
- Where is it safe to travel internationally?
- Who can get tested for COVID-19?
- What is the turnaround time for testing?
- Resources for schools, child care programs and colleges



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- Where can I find translated materials?
- Information for health care professionals
- Guidance for businesses
- Guidance for first responders
- Guidance for long-term care facilities

View these resources at healthvermont.gov/covid19

The CDC is regularly updating its guidance at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html.

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