

## HEALTH ADVISORY



### Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
1 Lower Navy Hill Road, Navy Hill, Saipan, MP 96950



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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **“WHO Declares Public Health Emergency; CHCC Launches New Website with Dedicated Coronavirus Resources”**

As of Thursday, January 30, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) around the ongoing outbreak of a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), which originated in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, in late December 2019. As of this release, there are no suspected or confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV in the CNMI.

Previous emergencies have included Ebola, Zika, and H1N1. Not all countries in the world were significantly impacted by those outbreaks, but by declaring a PHEIC, the WHO can mobilize resources and mount a coordinated international response. In line with the need for global solidarity, the WHO Emergency Committee felt that a global coordinated effort is needed to enhance preparedness in other regions of the world that may need additional support.

The committee also said in its meeting that they believe it is still possible to interrupt the spread of the virus if countries are vigilant and put in place strong preparedness measures.

Read the full update from the WHO here: [https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) is continuing surveillance of ports of entry and is working with community partners and organizations to ensure that should a case appear in the CNMI, we are prepared to contain it and mitigate risk to the community as much as possible.

We would also like to remind the community to take precautionary measures against becoming ill, not just with the novel coronavirus, but with other diseases with similar symptoms such as the common cold and the flu. It is believed that, similar to other coronaviruses, 2019-nCoV spreads through tiny droplets that a person coughs or sneezes onto surfaces around them. The danger of transmission comes from a non-sick person getting those droplets into their eyes or mouth.

It is important to note that how easily a virus spreads from person to person can vary. From what we know, the most likely way for transmission is if a sick person coughs or sneezes into their hand, then touches something like a bathroom door handle or shakes a non-sick person's hand. If that non-sick person touches the germs, then touches their eyes or mouth, the virus can get into their system.

What does this mean? It means that the most effective way to prevent the spread of 2019-nCoV, among other illnesses, is to:

1. **Wash your hands.** Washing your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water will get rid of germs that could make you sick. Wash your hands before eating or preparing food, before touching your face, after you cough or sneeze, and whenever your hands are visibly dirty. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
2. **Cough and sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands).** Make sure to throw the tissue away afterwards.
3. **Stay home if you are sick, and avoid contact with sick people.** If you are experiencing the symptoms of any upper respiratory illnesses (coughing, sneezing, fever, difficulty breathing), avoid public places and stay home or seek medical attention if needed.

According to interim guidance from the WHO on the use of masks in the community, released on January 29, there is no evidence that wearing a mask is a useful precaution to protect non-sick people. In fact, the WHO cautions that wearing a mask can give you a false sense of security and cause you to neglect other essential measures such as hand hygiene. Wearing a mask may be helpful only if combined with other steps to protect against illness. Additionally, wearing a mask if you are having symptoms may be helpful, because the mask provides an additional layer of protection against coughing and sneezing, similar to how a tissue would be used. It is important that proper mask hygiene and disposal practices are followed.

**In order to provide the CNMI public with updated information and resources, the CHCC has expedited the launch of our new website, which can be found at [www.chcc.gov.mp](http://www.chcc.gov.mp). A special page has been created with information about the coronavirus: [www.chcc.gov.mp/coronavirusinformation.php](http://www.chcc.gov.mp/coronavirusinformation.php), with a link included on the site home page.**

Please call the CHCC Public Health and Hospital Emergency Preparedness Program (PHEP) surveillance unit for more information at (670)234-8950.

For more information about CHCC programs, please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at [www.chcc.gov.mp](http://www.chcc.gov.mp) or call us at (670) 234-8950.

This health advisory may be found online at <http://www.chcc.gov.mp/pressrelease.html>

CHCC Point of Contact:

Zoe Travis, *Communications and Public Relations Specialist*  
(670) 234-8950 Ext. 3359, [communications@chcc.gov.mp](mailto:communications@chcc.gov.mp)