Dear Business Partners:

We’re writing today to provide an update on the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Our local public health agencies continue to work in partnership with the Ohio Department of Health to monitor the situation, and are prepared to protect health and prevent the spread of infectious disease. **As of March 2, 2020, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ohio.**

Over the last week in the United States, several instances of community spread of COVID-19 occurred in California, Washington and Oregon. These cases occurred in people with no travel history and no known source of exposure. According to the CDC, **for the general American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.**

The U.S. expects to detect more COVID-19 cases through travel, as well as more person-to-person spread and community transmission of this virus. We are continuing to coordinate our local preparedness and response activities accordingly.

Please read the summaries below for an update on the COVID-19 outbreak and public health’s response, as well as steps for how businesses can plan. Additionally, you may also wish to review the CDC’s [interim guidance for businesses](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/health-providers/guidance-for-businesses.html) for planning and response to COVID-19.

As a reminder, this situation is rapidly evolving and information will be updated as it becomes available. For the most accurate and current information on COVID-19, please continue to refer to the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html). You may also visit the [Ohio Department of Health](https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/) website for current updates about the situation in Ohio.

For questions, please contact:

- Columbus Public Health – Leslie diDonato at ljdidonato@columbus.gov
- Franklin County Public Health – Mitzi Kline at mitzikline@franklincountyohio.gov
- Delaware General Health District – Traci Whittaker at twhittaker@delawarehealth.org
- Licking County Health Department – Olivia Biggs at obiggs@lickingcohealth.org
- Union County Health Department – Mary Merriman at mary.merriman@uchd.net

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**Background Information**

- COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) is a respiratory illness that originated in Wuhan, Hubei, China in December 2019. It has since spread internationally to multiple countries, including the United States.
- **Those most at-risk for COVID-19 are people who have recently traveled to countries with sustained spread, including China, Iran, Italy Japan and South Korea, or people who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.**
- To slow and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S., the CDC introduced a [mandatory quarantine protocol](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) on February 2, 2020, for all travelers returning from China. The CDC has also issued [guidance for travel](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) to other countries with sustained spread of COVID-19.
What Public Health Is Doing

- Local public health agencies are working together and with the Ohio Department of Health to monitor the situation, and to plan an appropriate response.
- This includes working with ODH to implement the CDC's self-quarantine and self-monitoring protocol for travelers returning from mainland China for 14 days. During this time, public health actively monitors travelers for symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
- Once people have successfully completed active monitoring, they are no longer considered under quarantine and are not at risk for spreading COVID-19. If while under quarantine a person begins to develop symptoms of respiratory illness, public health connects them to appropriate care.

What You Can Do

Businesses are recommended to develop or review a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan. This includes:

- Considering the essential resources needed to keep your organization operating.
- Considering the effects on your organization’s operations if absenteeism were 25-40%.
- Identifying and cross-training employees to perform essential roles in the case of severe staffing shortages.
  - Considering which employees would most likely be absent if schools close.
  - Identifying alternate staff to fill essential positions.
- Planning how to communicate and coordinate with employees, customers/clients and suppliers during emergencies.
- Considering trigger points to:
  - Reduce operations to core activities with a diminished workforce
  - Temporarily reduce services
  - Shorten hours of operation
- Considering on-site housing arrangements for employees performing critical roles, if this were to become necessary.

In addition, please keep in mind:

- The CDC does not recommend any additional precautions for the general public at this time beyond the usual steps that help to prevent the spread of illness and the flu, including:
  - Washing 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 with at least 60% alcohol.
  - Covering coughs and sneezes with your arm or a tissue (then throwing the tissue away and washing your hands).
  - Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
  - Staying home when you are sick.
- You can help prevent the spread of misinformation by learning about COVID-19. Understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available. Visit the CDC website for the most up-to-date information.
- You can help fight stigma and fear by understanding that you cannot tell if someone is at risk for spreading COVID-19 based on how they look. Viruses cannot target people from specific populations, ethnicities or racial backgrounds. Furthermore, people who have successfully completed their quarantine for COVID-19 – or who have returned more than 14 days ago from areas where COVID-19 is active and do not have symptoms of COVID-19 – are not a risk to others. Treat everyone with compassion, kindness and respect.