PRESS RELEASE
February 29, 2020

FIRST DEATH IN THE U.S. FROM COVID-19 OCCURS IN STATE OF WASHINGTON
No Cases of Covid-19 in Santa Barbara County

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) – Today, the state of Washington reported the first death in the United States from Coronavirus Disease 2019, COVID-19. The deceased was a man in his 50s with underlying health conditions.

As of February 28, 2020, the California Department of Public Health Department (CDPH) reported there are a total of 34 positive cases in California: 24 are from repatriation flights. The other ten confirmed cases include seven that are travel related, one due to person-to-person exposure from a very close contact (a spouse) and two from unknown sources. Currently, there are no cases of COVID-19 in Santa Barbara County. The health risk from this coronavirus to the public remains low at this time. While COVID-19 has a high transmission rate, it has a low mortality rate. From the international data we have, of those who have tested positive for COVID-19, approximately 80 percent do not exhibit symptoms that would require hospitalization.

Per CDPH, test kits from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) used to detect Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) are now available in California and can be used to do diagnostic testing in the community. CDPH will immediately receive an additional shipment of kits to test up to 1,200 people. Currently, testing is only available at the CDPH lab and CDC lab in Atlanta and is reserved for severely ill patients.

“We are urging everyone to remain calm. We are not recommending universal testing for everyone at this time, since testing kits are still limited. Most people in our community are still at low health risk for serious complications from COVID-19. More widespread testing will be available in the near future, but we anticipate that testing will continue to be limited to severely ill people,” stated Dr. Henning Ansorg, Santa Barbara County Health Officer.

Locally in Santa Barbara County, the Public Health Department (PHD) is working closely with its healthcare partners to assure screening, testing, and care for potential COVID-19 patients. The PHD is providing ongoing guidance and alerts to healthcare partners in close coordination with CDPH and CDC. Healthcare partners, including EMS providers, are participating in weekly teleconferences with the PHD to assure that procedures are in place at each facility to safely screen patients and protect healthcare workers and the community.

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“Public Health has been working diligently to prepare for the possibility of a COVID-19 case in our county. Our team is closely monitoring COVID-19, and based on the current low level of transmission in the state, we do not have reasons to impose social distancing at this point in time,” shared Van Do-Reynoso, Director for the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department. “We will continue to communicate with community members and local health care providers as we know more.”

Here are steps you can take to protect your health and the health of those around you:

• Wash your hands with soap and water.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
• Stay away from work, school or other people if you become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever and cough.

For more information about COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019), please visit the SBCPHD website or call our information line at 805-681-4373.

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