

COVID-19 PRESS CONFERENCE

Talking points

3-12-20

Good Morning everyone, I appreciate all of you being here this morning.

I will introduce you, Byers and Executive Director of MEMA, Greg Michel,

You then introduce distinguished guests.

First case

- We do have our first positive case of COVID-19.
- We call it presumptive – meaning we will wait for final confirmation from the CDC.
- We expect to have that information on Friday.

Case details

- The individual is a Forest county adult male.
- He recently travelled to Florida.
- The patient immediately self-isolated to prevent further transmission to others.
- The patient was not hospitalized.

I did speak with Governor Reeves yesterday evening and he is fully aware of the situation and supportive of our response.

- Governor Tate Reeves and I have spoken at length about this first presumptive positive case.
- Since the beginning of the worldwide outbreak, the Governor and I have been in constant contact working together to ensure quick decisive action should the coronavirus reach our state.

- Throughout the week, Governor Reeves and I have stayed in contact so I could provide updates on the progress of our preparedness and response planning and any new developments.
- Due to our ongoing coordination and planning with the Governor and his staff we are prepared to respond immediately.

Just to remind everyone (what is COVID-19)

- The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) causes a febrile respiratory syndrome, like flu.
- Most common symptoms include fever and cough or shortness of breath.
- COVID-19 does easily spread person to person through respiratory droplets so strong hygiene and staying away from those that are ill is important.

Is COVID-19 dangerous?

- Many cases may have mild symptoms.
- Severe cases can occur, leading to respiratory failure and death, especially among older adults (65+) and those with chronic medical conditions.
- However, most people infected with COVID-19 will fully recover.

Testing and Vaccine availability

- There is no antiviral treatment or vaccine currently available for COVID-19.
- Testing for COVID-19 is available at the Mississippi State Department of Health and private labs by physician request.
- Our public health lab turn-around time is typically with 24 hours once received.

Along with our first presumptive case, I have three other major announcements:

- MSDH is expanding access to COVID-19 testing.
- MSDH is expanding long-term care visitor recommendations statewide.
- MSDH is making recommendations about mass gatherings.

Access to testing

- MSDH is expanding and streamlining access for COVID-19 testing.
- Although COVID-19 testing has been available throughout MS with physician consultation, physician to physician communication is no longer required. Specimens may be submitted just like any other lab test.
- COVID-19 testing can be ordered through commercial labs.
- Testing for COVID-19 does not mean a patient is likely to have COVID-19. There are many other respiratory illnesses circulating – including allergies – that mimic some of the symptoms of COVID-19.

MSDH is expanding long-term care visitor recommendations statewide.

MSDH recommends that all long-term care facilities, personal care homes and group care sites for those with disabilities take the following actions to restrict visitors:

- a. MSDH recommends discontinuing group social activities.
- b. Consider restricting visitation until further notification.
- c. Post signs that discourage all nonessential visitation and discourage ill visitors from entering the facility.
- d. Keep all ill visitors away from the facility for at least 48 hours after symptoms resolve.
- e. Consider limiting visitation by children (especially during community wide outbreaks) and the elderly or those with underlying medical problems that place them at risk.
- f. Postpone all groups (like school groups or church groups) from visiting facility — this goes along with discontinuing all group activities.
- g. Visitors should cover their coughs and be educated on the importance of hand hygiene.
- h. Make sure the facility has plenty of hand washing products and that visitors have access to them.
- i. Visitors should only visit their family members and should not have contact with other residents since they could spread the virus.
- j. It is unclear at this time how long these recommendations will be in place.

Finally, MSDH recommendations regarding mass gatherings.

To prevent dissemination of COVID-19 in the community, MSDH recommends that individuals, communities and organizations take the following steps:

- To prevent illness in those most vulnerable, MSDH recommends that anyone > 65 years old OR with chronic medical conditions avoid any gathering of greater than 250 people.
- MSDH recommends that everyone stay informed about COVID-19 and avoid any mass gathering of >250 people if there is evidence of transmission in your county or adjacent counties.
- MSDH recommends that communities and organizations contact us at 877-978-6453 to determine if cancellation is warranted or if other preventive steps might be enough.

Everyone attending mass gatherings should take extra precautions at this time, including:

- Regular hand hygiene with hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- If ill, do not attend any public event and call your physician or provider if needed.
- Maintain social distancing as practical. A separation zone of 6 feet has been identified as ideal based on CDC infection control practices.
- Schools throughout the state should consider cancelling any mass gatherings, including assembly and social events.
- There is no indication to close schools at the time.

Department of Corrections

- Effective immediately, the Mississippi Department of Corrections is temporarily suspending visitation at all facilities where MDOC are housed in order to establish sanitation and prevention protocols to prevent the spread of COVID 19.
- This is a precautionary measure to protect staff, inmates, volunteers and visitors from potential exposure to the virus.

- Attorneys and essential visitors will be allowed at the facility, and the visiting area will be sanitized upon completion of each visit. Additional parameters will be determined as protocols are established.
- MDOC is reinforcing common health practices based on preventive measures recommended by the MSDH and the CDC.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING, WE APPRECIATE THE SOLID AND FACTUAL REPORTING BY OUR LOCAL MEDIA.

AT THIS TIME, I AM HAPPY TO ENTERTAIN QUESTIONS FIRST HERE IN THE ROOM.