Delaware County’s March 14 Update to Brief Residents on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Delaware County Council, joined by members of Delaware County’s Emergency Services and Delaware County’s Department of Intercommunity Health held a press conference on March 14 to provide an update on 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19.)

Today the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced four additional presumptive positive cases of COVID-19 in the state. Thankfully, there are NO new cases in Delaware County. The total number of cases in Delaware County is six. The total number of cases in the state is 45.

Yesterday Governor Wolf advised that non-essential retail facilities should close. The Governor gave examples of non-essential businesses. These include movie theatres, shopping malls, and gyms. Essential retail facilities such as pharmacies, grocery stores and gas stations will remain open. Residents should not be panicking. Food stores,
pharmacies and gas stations and their suppliers will remain open. The goal is to prevent
of the spread of the virus. Limiting unnecessary social outings like going to the movies,
the gym, clothes shopping, etc. is how we can accomplish this.

Delaware County is strongly urging business owners and residents to follow this
guidance. It is important that we are all following to the guidance coming from the
Federal Government, the State and the County. We have the opportunity to stay ahead of
this if we take these precautions immediately. We have a very narrow window of time to
take measures now to prevent this from rapidly spreading.

“This isn’t about the idea of ‘I would be ok if I got the virus and would recover.’
It’s now become the need to have community responsibility,” said Delaware County
Council Chairman Brian Zidek. “If you contract the virus and spread it to your immediate
family and 10 people, those people spread it to 10 more people…and so on. This is what
we’re seeing in other countries. We have the opportunity to learn from other countries
and do things differently and can mitigate the spread of the virus. But that doesn’t work if
we’re not all taking measures.”

Council acknowledged the concern that businesses shutting down for two weeks
may hurt local business owners. Delaware County will be working with the Commerce
Center and other organizations and departments to request federal relief funding for
businesses. Council had discussions yesterday and today on ways to lessen the financial
burden for our small businesses and will be sharing that information soon.

“Closing for two weeks will be a burden for some of our local business owners,”
said Zidek. “Yet, a much larger burden will be if we are in the same situation as other
countries and our businesses are impacted for a much longer time frame. We are urging
business owners and residents to have exercise community responsibility as they make
decisions on opening and going out.”

Council also proved an update on a presumptive positive case of COVID-19 at the
George W. Hill Correctional Facility.

Yesterday the GEO Group, who runs the County’s prison, received confirmation
that an employee of the prison had tested positive for COVID-19. They followed
guidance from the CDC and advised 23 prison employees who had been in contact with
the individual who tested positive to self-quarantine at home. They placed 11 inmates
who had been in contact with the infected employee in quarantine in a separate unit of the
prison. GEO is working with the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The 23 employees
and 11 inmates are being tested. Those results have not come back yet. None of them are
showing any symptoms of the virus.

This is an example of how one infected person affects countless others. One
positive case led to quarantining 34 others. We are seeing this around the country. It can
cripple vital services like health care and emergency first responders.
This past week, Governor Wolf strongly encouraged the suspension of large gatherings of 250 people or more in the state. The County continue to stress that if it’s not essential- please stay home. The Governor also recommended that religious leaders exercise discretion in hosting services and events in order to mitigate the spread of illness.

“Many residents may be planning to gather for religious services this weekend,” said Vice Chair Dr. Monica Taylor. “During times like this, it can be comforting to lean on our faith and for many the advice to not gather for religious services is upsetting. We do understand this. Right now there is guidance from the CDC and the State that avoiding social settings is one of the main ways we can prevent the spread of this virus. We are encouraging residents to not attend religious services where they will be in large groups and in close proximity to others.”

Yesterday, and again this afternoon Delaware County Council was in communication with their colleagues in Montgomery, Chester, Philadelphia and Bucks County. The counties are working collectively on mitigation efforts to flatten the curve.

Unlike neighboring counties, Delaware County does not have a County Health Department. The County is dependent upon the Pennsylvania Department of Health to test, investigate, quarantine and monitor residents in Delaware County who have, or may have COVID-19. The County is also dependent upon the State to receive information and updates. Currently, the County is not given the municipality of where a patient lives, information on the contact tracing or how many people have been quarantined as a result. Having more information would allow the County to make more informed decisions and give better guidance to residents.

“While we understand the Pennsylvania Department of Health has been working around the clock and assisting the entire state, we as a county need to do more for our residents,” said Zidek. “Council is exploring options on how to achieve this goal and we hope to have an update in the days to come.”

Residents should refrain from going to Emergency Rooms if they have symptoms and want to get tested for COVID-19. Local Emergency Rooms are not testing for COVID-19. If you have symptoms- you should call 911 or 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

Emergency Rooms are not testing and we don’t want residents to be in hospitals if it’s not necessary, where they are more likely to contract the virus or other illnesses. If you have another health emergency—then you should go the ER as you normally would.

Residents have notified the County that they have called the state’s hotline- 1-877-PA-HEALTH and have not been able to get through. The County has contacted the State to alert them.

Other updates:
The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission Chairman signed an emergency order prohibiting electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, telecommunication and steam utility terminations. This means no Pennsylvania residents will have their utilities such as water, electric or gas shut off. The moratorium will remain in place for as long as the Proclamation of Disaster, issued by Governor Wolf on March 6 is in effect. Under the order, terminations would be permitted only in the event of a safety emergency.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources announced that Ridley Creek State Park will be closed for 14 days, effective March 16 to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The Office of Commonwealth Libraries has instructed all public libraries to follow the Governor's guidance and close for 2 weeks. All Delaware County libraries will close Monday, March 16.

Right now the best way to protect yourself is to take the same precautions you would to prevent the flu or common cold:

⦁ Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze with your elbow to avoid touching your face
⦁ Wash your hands often with soap and warm/hot water for at least 20 seconds
⦁ Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
⦁ Clean surfaces frequently, including countertops, light switches, cell phones, remotes, and other frequently touched items
⦁ If you are feeling sick, stay home. Rest, take care of yourself and don’t spread the germs.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you are asked to call the State Health Department at 1-877-PA-HEALTH or 911.

The County has created a website dedicated to information on the Coronavirus, including prevention, resources and a FAQ section with link to the PA Health Department and CDC. The website is:


Residents are encouraged to register for the DelcoAlert notification system which alerts residents of updates and emergencies. You can register here:

www.delcopa.gov/delcoalert/delcoalert.html