Delaware County Holds Update to Brief Residents on COVID-19

Delaware County Council, joined by members of Delaware County’s Department of Intercommunity Health and Delaware County’s Emergency Services held a press conference on March 7 to provide an update on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19.)

On March 6, Governor Wolf announced there are two presumptive positive cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus in Pennsylvania, one of which is in Delaware County.

“The best news we can report this afternoon is that there are no new cases in Delaware County,” said Delaware County Council Vice Chair Dr. Monica Taylor. “Delaware County been working around to clock to ensure we are doing everything we can on our end to protect our residents and prevent the spread.”

Prior to the press conference, Council spoke with officials from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, including the Incident Commander, Deputy Secretary of
Emergency Preparedness, an Epidemiologist and officials from Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA.)

The Pennsylvania Department of Health has community nurses in Delaware County who are talking to residents who may have been in contact with the woman who is presumed positive. They are conducting aggressive contact tracing to identify the people this individual may have come into contact with and are alerting those people. They will quarantine when warranted and they will notify public locations when warranted.

There has been some feedback from the community about the decision to not release the municipality of where the woman who has tested presumptive positive resides.

“We want to reiterate that the decision came from the Pennsylvania Department of Health,” said Vice Chair Dr. Taylor. “During their briefings to the County, the State has not disclosed where the female resides. We are sharing with residents what facts we know.”

Council and various legislators have urged the Governor to make more information about the patient available.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health follows procedures to comply with the Disease Control and Prevention Act. This acts prohibits the State from releasing identifying information about a patient unless there is an imminent threat.

Unlike surrounding counties, Delaware County does not have a County Health Department. County Health Departments do not fall under this state law and have the ability to release information to their residents as they see fit.

There are also reports of where this female lived circulating in the press and on social media. Johns Hopkins’ website has an international map of confirmed COVID-19 cases. Zooming in to the map shows a home in South Media. This is NOT where the patient lives. The location is aggregated to the Center of the County. It is not an indication of where the female lives.

During the press conference, Council provided an update on what the County has done in the past 24 hours since the last press briefing.

On March 7, Delaware County Council Chairman Brian Zidek signed an emergency declaration. With a presumed case of Covid-19 within the County, an emergency disaster declaration would provide increased support to agencies, departments and local municipalities involved in the response to the virus. A declaration would also provide Council the authority to act in the public interest with regards to scheduling public meetings and assemblies. The declaration also ensures that the County can receive
financial assistance from the State and federal government if needed.

On the afternoon of March 6, the County had a call with school superintendents across the county. At this time the Pennsylvania Health Department and CDC are not advising schools to close. The decision to close a school would be made by the individual school district. The County has shared resources with superintendents on prevention and guidance from the State and CDC. Most schools are performing extra cleaning this weekend to ensure schools are as germ free as possible.

The County has limited visitors to Fair Acres, the County’s nursing home. Non-essential visitors will not be permitted into the building. Visitors who require entry will need to contact management and be screened before entering. All new admissions must be screened by the Medical Director prior to admission. Only essential deliveries or vendors will be allowed into the building. Fair Acres is advising that residents stay on campus. Fair Acres employees who have traveled are asked to contact the Medical Management Department prior to returning to work. Fair Acres management is stressing to all employees and residents the need to properly wash hands with soap and water and/or use an alcohol hand sanitizer to prevent the spread of germs.

“The protocols put in place at Fair Acres were made to ensure that the residents, who are often more vulnerable, are protected as much as possible,” said Councilwoman Elaine Schaefer.

Currently, 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.

“We want to assure you that we are prepared,” said Schaefer. “County officials first began meeting in January to discuss how the County can prevent the spread of Coronavirus and also how to plan for a local outbreak. Members have been in daily communication with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor the situation.”

Updates and resources from the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health can be found here: www.health.pa.gov

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 can be found here: www.delcopa.gov/ich/resources/coronavirus.html