



ALBEMARLE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES
Partners in Public Health

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ALBEMARLE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES RECOGNIZES COVID-19
COMMUNITY SPREAD**

Residents urged to take daily precautions to protect themselves and loved ones

Elizabeth City, NC – Albemarle Regional Health Services (ARHS) is working diligently to inform the community about the current status of COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus 19. While patient privacy is a top priority to ARHS, officials understand the public's concern about this rapidly evolving situation. Patient information will not be released related to the first lab confirmed positive in Pasquotank County, however, this case was likely related to domestic travel, the patient was isolated when tested and advised to limit all contacts, and is at home recovering. Public health, as a standard practice, investigates all reportable health conditions. ARHS will continue to trace contacts of lab confirmed cases to the extent possible, as long as staff can do so based on the spread of the virus in our area. This will be especially important in our most vulnerable populations like congregate living facilities.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has now announced there is community transmission of COVID-19 in N.C. Therefore, we are moving from a strategy of containment to mitigation to help slow the spread of the virus. Recent steps taken to protect ourselves and our community in order to prepare for this (i.e. social distancing, cancelling of mass gatherings, school closures, etc.), are even more important now in order to slow the spread of this illness, protect our most vulnerable population, and protect our health care infrastructure.

“Since we know COVID-19 is transmissible throughout our communities, much like seasonal flu and other viral respiratory illness, it is not necessary to do mass screenings. It is most important that people stay home if they are sick and follow local, state and federal guidelines for infection control to protect themselves and their loved ones,” said R. Battle Betts, Jr., MPA, Health Director. “Most healthy individuals will be able to recover at home without needing medical care, and the vast majority will not need a lab test. We want to make sure that those needing medical care can get it – and we need our community’s help in making sure that can happen by taking this seriously. Public health measures can slow the transmission; we can flatten the infection curve.”

Additional testing within the home of a known positive is not clinically recommended, as anyone that is symptomatic in the home would be considered positive for the virus. Testing could create a false negative result (or false sense of security) as the incubation period for the virus varies and symptoms may not show up until later in the 14-day isolation period. Due to the nature of community spread of this illness, it is most important for individuals to stay home when they are sick and limit all contacts as much as possible. However, ARHS and local providers are using guidance from the CDC and NC DHHS regarding screening for COVID-19. Criteria for COVID-19 testing includes a fever of 100.4 or greater, symptoms of a lower respiratory infection, including cough and difficulty breathing, a negative flu test and the healthcare provider’s recommendation. Local health care providers and health departments are properly

equipped to test needed individuals. When an individual is tested, they are to remain in isolation until a negative test result is received. If an individual receives a positive test result, they are to remain isolated until the following criteria are met:

- At least 7 days since symptom onset **and** more than 72 hours after symptom resolution (absence of fever without the use of fever-reducing medication and improvement in respiratory symptoms), whichever is longer.
- Absence of fever (without use of fever-reducing medication), improvement in respiratory symptoms, and 2 negative test results conducted on specimens collected at least 24 hours apart.

Currently, there are no vaccines or specific pharmaceutical treatments available for COVID-19. Public health interventions are and will continue to be an important tool to reduce transmission and prevent the spread of COVID-19. ARHS is asking our communities to practice preventive and safety measures that will help prevent the spread of the virus. These precautions include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Practice social distancing; avoid handshakes, hugs and other close contact.

If you are concerned that you are becoming ill, please track your symptoms and contact your healthcare provider by phone. This is important, as it will reduce the risk of exposure to others.

ARHS encourages the community to visit the following websites for the most credible information:

Albemarle Regional Health Services - <http://www.arhs-nc.org/>

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services - <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/>

Center for Disease Control - <https://www.cdc.gov/>

For more information, please contact Amy Underhill, ARHS Public Information Officer at 252-338-4448 or aunderhill@arhs-nc.org.

Albemarle Regional Health Services is dedicated to disease prevention and the promotion of a healthy environment to reduce morbidity, mortality, and disability through quality service, education, and advocacy.

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