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**Ventura County Public Health Press Release**

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**Coronavirus (COVID-19) Preparedness:  
Public Health Urges Preparedness for Social Distancing**

Ventura, CA - In the face of a significant increase in the numbers of confirmed cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in mainland China and other Countries, many Ventura County residents are understandably worried and fearful. The Ventura County Department of Public Health (Public Health), out of an abundance of caution, is seeking to solidify the County's readiness should the COVID-19 virus be found here or in a nearby county.

Public Health is urging agencies, businesses, school districts, organizations and health care providers throughout the County to develop and/or update a plan for social distancing. "These groups are being asked to accomplish this within 24 to 48 hours," said Dr. Robert Levin, Health Officer. "The discovery of community transmission elsewhere in the State makes me feel that COVID-19 could arrive in our County at any time and we want to be prepared." Community transmission means person-to-person spread. "Our first level of protection comes from the quarantine and isolation of certain individuals," said Dr. Levin. Levin stressed that these plans will not be put into effect immediately. "Once cases of COVID-19 are found in the community, it's time to implement social distancing plans." Social distancing means lessening contact between individuals throughout the County. Businesses, for instance, would review their staffing and identify workers who could work from home. This results in fewer people and less contact between people at the workplace as well. Members of the public should speak with their employer about whether they can still fulfill responsibilities of their jobs while working from home.

A population that is at particular risk from the COVID-19 is the elderly. Extended Care Facilities are being asked to write or update their plans for protecting their residents from interaction with those from outside their place of residence.

While children seem to be faring better than other groups with COVID-19, schools have made significant advances in their planning for possible temporary closure. Some schools were closed for weeks during the H1N1 pandemic ten years ago. It is important that schools and childcare facilities have a plan in place and are communicating with parents.

Primary care medical sites are being asked to implement plans to communicate with patients via Skype, FaceTime and over the phone. Many patient visits can be dealt with distantly thus avoiding crowding of clinics and the resulting increased risk of close contact which might further spread COVID-19.

There is little evidence that pregnant women are at particularly increased risk from this virus, but special care should still be taken to decrease their social contacts.

Gatherings such as regular religious services might consider live streaming their service so that congregants can view the service from home, or they may consider modifying their service so that there can be at least two spaces between each congregant.

“The cancelation of large, non-essential gatherings is a possibility down the line,” said Dr. Levin. “Implementation of social distancing plans should be handled with creativity, flexibility and sensitivity.”

Above all, people who are starting to feel ill or who are ill, should stay away from others and not go into crowded settings.

People should continue to practice the same habits they perform to prevent themselves from getting the flu. They should wash their hands frequently, elbow or fist bump one another instead of shaking hands or hugging, sneeze or cough into the crook of their elbow and maintain a six foot or greater distance between themselves and anyone who looks ill. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Get a flu immunization to prevent influenza if you have not done so this season. The only two needs for face masks are the wearing of a surgical mask if you are ill and going out in public, such as going to the doctor’s office or if you are a health care worker, wearing an N95 mask when you are interacting with patients.

Preparedness information and up to date information about the situation in the County of Ventura can be found at [www.vcemergency.com](http://www.vcemergency.com). Updates will also continue to be provided on County of Ventura social media Facebook: @countyofventura, Twitter: @CountyVentura, Nextdoor @CountyofVentura, Instagram: @ventura\_county\_news.

For the most up to date information regarding the 2019 novel coronavirus on the national level, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.