

Second Presumptive Positive Case of COVID-19 Identified by Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health Thursday announced its second presumptive positive case of COVID-19 since testing started Friday, February 28, at the State Public Health Laboratory. The woman is in her 60s and lives in Middlesex County. Her recent European travel included northern Italy. She was symptomatic, did not require hospitalization, and is recovering at home.

The State Public Health Lab's result is considered presumptive positive and the specimens will now be sent to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for confirmation. This case brings the total number of COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts to three – one confirmed and two presumptive positive – since the outbreak started in the US in January. The risk to the public from COVID-19 remains low in Massachusetts.

“We appreciate this patient's cooperation,” said Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH. “While the risk to Massachusetts remains low, residents should make sure they and their families are well-informed about COVID-19 and heed the CDC's updated international travel health alert.”

Since January, Massachusetts has tested 25 residents, including the first confirmed case and the first presumptive positive case.

Going forward, the Department of Public Health will be updating confirmed and presumptive positive cases on a daily basis at mass.gov/2019coronavirus.

As of yesterday, 719 people have been subject to self-quarantine in Massachusetts because of COVID-19. Of those, 470 people have completed monitoring and are no longer quarantined, while 249 are currently quarantined. This information is updated on the DPH website each Wednesday.

Additionally, DPH was notified by the Tennessee Department of Health that its first presumptive positive COVID-19 case was a man who traveled on a nonstop, round-trip flight between Boston Logan Airport and the Nashville International Airport, and was asymptomatic while traveling. DPH is working with Tennessee health officials and the Boston Public Health Commission to identify his close contacts.

The CDC has updated its Travel Health Alert for all United States residents, instructing travelers returning from countries with a Level 3 alert (currently China, South Korea, Iran, and Italy) to stay home and monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the US. This guidance also instructs travelers from countries with a Level 2 alert (currently Japan) to monitor their health and limit interactions with others for 14 days after returning to the US. The guidance advises against any non-essential travel to Level 3 countries.

Coronaviruses are respiratory viruses and are generally spread through respiratory secretions (droplets from coughs and sneezes) of an infected person to another person. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath, and, in severe cases, pneumonia (fluid in the lungs). Information is still limited about how this novel coronavirus spreads. More information on COVID-19 is available at mass.gov/2019coronavirus.

According to the CDC, as of today, there have been 99 US cases of COVID-19 confirmed. Globally, more than 93,000 cases have been confirmed. There have been a total of 10 deaths in the US.

Although the risk of the novel coronavirus to Massachusetts residents remains low, and the risk of the flu is high, people are advised to take many of the same steps they do to help prevent colds and the flu, including:

- Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes and face.
- Clean things that are frequently touched (like doorknobs and countertops) with household cleaning spray or wipes.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- Stay home when feeling sick.
- Stay informed.
- Get a flu shot.

Clinicians who have patients they think may have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 must contact DPH via the 24/7 EPI line (617-983-6800).

The State Lab has an adequate supply of test kits from the CDC for testing. The anticipated turnaround of test results from the State Lab is 24 hours, depending on testing volume.

Individuals who are in voluntary self-quarantine continue to be monitored by their local boards of health.

People who have recently traveled from an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19 and who have symptoms of the disease (fever, cough, shortness of breath) should reach out to their healthcare provider and call ahead before going to a healthcare facility.

For more information on COVID-19 visit mass.gov/2019coronavirus.