



Press Release

Hamilton County Health Department

Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

March 24, 2020

Health Department Announces Community Spread of COVID-19 Occurring

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – The Hamilton County Health Department reports 7 new cases of coronavirus (COVID-19), bringing the total to 15. Some of these cases have no known contacts with people who are positive for the COVID-19 virus, indicating that community spread is happening. Community spread means that the source of an individual's infection cannot be traced to a particular person who is positive for the disease. The primary source of infection for COVID-19 is person-to-person transmission, but other sources include people who do not show symptoms (asymptomatic carriers) and objects or surfaces in the environment that are contaminated with the virus. The virus is transmitted when someone touches the infected surface, then touches their face. Community spread will contribute to an increase in new cases.

Of the 15 total cases so far, 8 are between the ages of 30-59 years, while the remaining 7 cases are 60 years or older. Ten of the cases are males and all are white.

"We know the announcement of community spread is unsettling to our residents," says Health Department Administrator Becky Barnes, "However, this makes it extremely important that people of all ages and backgrounds continue to stay at home, do not have house guests or play dates, and practice strict social distancing."

For anyone sick with any cold or flu-like symptoms, it is strongly urged for them to isolate at home, regardless of whether they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or not. Community spread indicates that more people have the disease than are known about through assessment and testing. If you become sick enough to seek out a doctor, call them first before leaving the house.

Stricter social distancing means:

- Limit supply runs to groceries, medicine, or essential items.
- When in public places, such as the grocery store or public parks, keep at least 6 feet distance from people.
- Businesses should heed the executive orders issued by state and local governments.

Continue to use the everyday actions to protect yourself:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are unavailable, use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home if you are sick to protect others.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve, elbow, or tissue. Discard the tissue immediately after use.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects.

All age groups are at risk for COVID-19 infection. According to the most recent information from the [CDC](#), those most at risk for severe illness include:

- People aged 65 years and older.
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility.
- Other high-risk conditions could include:
 - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma;
 - People who have serious heart conditions;
 - People who are immunocompromised including cancer treatment;
 - People of any age with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] >40) or certain underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, such as those with diabetes, renal failure, or liver disease might also be at risk;
- People who are pregnant should be monitored since they are known to be at risk with severe viral illness, however, to date data on COVID-19 has not shown increased risk.
- Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications.

For more information about COVID-19, please call our hotline call center at 423-209-8383. The hours are Monday-Friday 8AM-6PM, Saturday 10AM-3PM, and Sunday from 10AM-2PM, however, hours may need to change to meet the demand. Refer to the Health Department's [website](#) for hours.

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