COVID-19: Information on Prevention, Precautions, and Hospital and Health Care Preparation in Virginia

As the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) continues to spread around the globe and in the U.S., Virginia hospitals and health systems are actively engaged with state, federal, and local partners to prepare for the potential arrival and spread of the disease in the Commonwealth. When it comes to treatment of patients who presents with symptoms of COVID-19, or any other respiratory illness, Virginia hospitals' top priority is always the safety of patients and staff, and healthy outcomes for patients and their families.

Virginia hospitals work with state, federal, and local partners on a continuous basis to plan and prepare for, and respond to, all types of emergency situations that could result in a surge of patients seeking care and treatment. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) partners with the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) to administer the [Virginia Healthcare Emergency Management Program (VHEMP)](#), which coordinates emergency preparedness planning, information sharing, resource coordination, and management for health care providers across the Commonwealth. VHEMP is actively engaged with its partners to ensure hospitals are prepared if COVID-19 spreads in Virginia.

Listed below are some frequently asked questions regarding COVID-19, information about Virginia hospital preparedness efforts, and links to important external resources. Because the COVID-19 outbreak is a rapidly evolving situation, we encourage you to visit this webpage and the external links to receive up-to-date information about this ongoing situation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person-to-person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China in late 2019.

What are the Symptoms of COVID-19?

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed COVID-19 cases. Symptoms may appear two to 14 days after exposure and include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. In mild cases, people may feel few symptoms or be asymptomatic. In severe cases, people may develop pneumonia-like symptoms. Contact your health care professional immediately if you develop these symptoms and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you recently traveled to an area where the disease is widespread.

How does COVID-19 Spread?

COVID-19 is a new disease so there is still much to learn about how it spreads, the severity of the illness it causes, and the extent to which it may spread in the U.S. What is known is that the disease is

believed to be spread primarily from person-to-person through close contact (within six feet) with an infected person who coughs or sneezes. It may be possible for a person to contract COVID-19 by touching a surface on which the virus is present, and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. It also may be possible for the virus to be spread by infected people who are asymptomatic.

How is COVID-19 Prevented and Treated?

At present, this is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. So, the best way to prevent the illness is to avoid exposure to the virus. Taking these preventive steps can help stop the spread of respiratory diseases:
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
- Stay home if you are sick;
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and throw that tissue in the trash;
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with a household cleaner; and
- Regularly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Should I Wear a Mask to Prevent COVID-19?

People who are well do not need to wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illness, including COVID-19, per guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Facemasks should be used by people who display symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent spreading the disease. Facemasks should be worn by health care workers and people caring for others who are ill in close settings.

What Should I do if get Sick?

Contact your health care provider if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness (such as cough or difficulty breathing) after being in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you live in or have visited a place where the illness is spreading. Tell your health care provider about any recent travel or contact that may have exposed you to the virus. Your health care provider will work with VDH and the CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19. Click here for additional information on steps to prevent the spread of the disease once ill.

Where can I Find Information About the Number of Cases in Virginia?

VDH is regularly updating information online regarding the number of people being investigated, monitored, and tested for exposure to COVID-19. Those statistics can be found on the VDH website.

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What are Virginia Hospitals Doing to Prepare?

Virginia hospitals and health systems are closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19 and taking steps to mitigate the threat in the Commonwealth. This includes educating staff and patients on COVID-19 precautions, implementing guidance from public health officials such as screening and monitoring patients potentially exposed to the virus, implementing isolation and quarantine procedures for infected patients as appropriate, and initiating appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) usage protocols. Hospitals are also reviewing their emergency preparedness plans and coordinating with VHEMP to ensure those activities are coordinated across the Commonwealth. VHEMP is conducting an inventory of PPE to ensure an adequate supply is available in the event of a widespread COVID-19 outbreak in Virginia. In addition to these efforts, hospital and health system leaders have formed a work group with public health officials to ensure that all who are involved in combatting the spread of COVID-19, and caring for patients, have access to the same up-to-date information.

Should I Still Go to the Hospital if I Don't Have COVID-19?

Patients with scheduled procedures and those with medical emergencies emergency should still proceed with a planned procedure or seek emergency medical care as needed. Hospitals are operating normally – planned procedures are occurring as scheduled for patients who need joint replacement surgery, cancer treatment, cardiovascular procedures, and more. Hospitals emergency departments continue to care for patients experiencing heart attacks, strokes, or other emergency medical conditions. It is important to remember that not everyone infected with COVID-19 will need to be hospitalized. If a widespread disease outbreak occurs leading to a surge of patients at Virginia hospitals, however, hospitals can coordinate with VHEMP to address any patient capacity issues to ensure patients have access to the care they need.

Where can Virginia Hospitals Access Information on Preparing for COVID-19?

Information about preparing for COVID-19 in health care settings can be found on the CDC's website.

Where Can Virginia Hospitals Find Guidelines Related to COVID-19?

Interim guidance for healthcare facilities can be found on the CDC's website. Additional guidance related to long-term care facilities can be found here. VDH guidance on COVID-19 testing and laboratory procedures can be found here.

What is VHEMP?

Since 2002, the Virginia Healthcare Emergency Management Program has functioned as a partnership between VHHA and VDH to develop and coordinate the Virginia health care system's emergency preparedness and response activities. The program is funded through a grant from the Assistant Secretary

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of Preparedness and Response (ASPR) within the federal Department of Health and Human Services. VHEMP consists of six regional healthcare coalitions that actively participate in operational planning, information sharing, resource coordination and management, emergency preparedness training and exercises, and, when necessary, coordinate and respond to man-made and natural disasters.

External Resources

[Virginia Department of Health COVID-19 Webpage](#)

[Centers for Disease Control COVID-19 Webpage](#)

[CDC – What Healthcare Providers Should Know](#)

[CDC – Frequently Asked Questions for Healthcare Providers](#)

Virginia Healthcare Emergency Management Program

VIRGINIA HOSPITAL & HEALTHCARE ASSOCIATION

An alliance of hospitals and health delivery systems