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Lamorinda takes precautions to combat coronavirus

By Nick Marnell

Local community organizations remain on alert for the spread of COVID-19, a disease that first appeared late last year in Wuhan, China. COVID-19 is caused by a member of the coronavirus family, a close relation to the SARS and MERS viruses which have caused outbreaks in the past.

While there were no documented cases of people contracting the disease in Contra Costa County through February, a March 2 statement from Anna Roth, director of Contra Costa Health Services, noted that cases were expected to rise in the county, with the potential for the outbreak to turn into a pandemic. "Although this is a difficult message to share, it is important to recognize how difficult the times ahead may be," Roth wrote.

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, which also dispatches emergency calls for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, is adjusting its dispatcher protocols to ensure that callers with appropriate symptoms are queried about travel to parts of the world that have experienced COVID-19 outbreaks. Alliance partner American Medical Response has premade kits for outfitting ambulances to accommodate transport of known infected patients, according to Steve Hill, ConFire public information officer.

The Acalanes Union High School District issued a directive to parents Feb. 28. "At this time, we emphasize the importance of hand washing, respiratory hygiene and asking students and staff who have flu like symptoms to stay home, seek medical attention as appropriate and remain home until symptoms subside," Superintendent John Nickerson said. CCHS Public Health Director Dan Peddycord was "not recommending school closures at this time, or restricting student attendance outside of normal flu activity," as of early March.

Catholics who are ill, especially those who suffer from a contagious disease, are excused from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, according to Helen Osman of the Diocese of Oakland. Pastors of the Lamorinda parishes have the option to suspend community rituals at Mass, such as shaking hands at the Sign of Peace, Osman said.

"We are cautiously concerned," said Daniel Collier, general manager of Lafayette's Diablo Foods. "We do not want to add to a state of panic, but we want to protect our customers, employees and the community." The company has ordered extra hand sanitizing stations for use throughout the store.

According to CCHS, the best way to reduce your risk of becoming infected with a respiratory disease, such as COVID-19, is to practice good hygiene:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water is not available

- People who are sick should always cover their coughs and sneezes using a tissue or the crook of their elbow; wash your hands after using a tissue

- People who are sick should stay home from work or school until they are well

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your unwashed hands

- Bump elbows or bow instead of shaking hands.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests making preparations for a potential period of time when you or a family member may need to stay home. This would include ensuring you have a 30 to 90 day supply of all medications, enough nonperishable food on hand, and pet food.

For more information, visit cchealth.org or cdc.gov

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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