Public Health: What to do if you have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or are worried that you may have COVID-19

Summary:
Public Health has specific advice for people who have been confirmed with COVID-19, have been around someone with COVID-19, or are feeling unwell but haven’t been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. With respect to testing, Public Health – Seattle & King County does not typically conduct testing. Testing is typically conducted by taking a swab at a health care provider’s office.

Story:
In King County, we currently have reported 51 confirmed cases of COVID-19. We are likely to see many more cases of COVID-19 in the coming days and weeks. Symptoms of COVID-19 typically include fever, cough or shortness of breath. Here is guidance on what to do:

What to do if you have confirmed or suspected COVID-19
- Restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care.
- Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home.
- Do not go to work, school or public areas.
- Avoid using public transportation, taxis, or ride-share.
- Monitor your symptoms and call before visiting your doctor. If you have an appointment, be sure you tell them you have or may have COVID-19.
• If you have one, wear a facemask around other people, such as sharing a room or vehicle, or around pets and before entering a healthcare provider’s office.
• If you can’t wear a mask because it’s hard for you to breathe while wearing one, then keep people who live with you out of your room, or have them wear a facemask if they come in your room.
• Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and throw away in a lined trashcan. Wash hands thoroughly afterwards. Soap and water is best.
• Avoid sharing personal household items like dishes and glasses, or bedding.
• Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If you can’t wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Rub hands together until dry.
• Clean all “high touch” surfaces every day, such as counters, tables, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, phones, and keyboards.
• Use a household cleaning product to clean, following the manufacturer’s recommendations.
• If you are having a medical emergency, call 9-1-1. Notify dispatch that you have or may have COVID-19.
• Remain in home isolation for 7 days OR until 72 hours after your fever has resolved (and symptoms get better) whichever is longer.

What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed COVID-19
First, know that you generally need to be in close contact with someone with COVID-19 to get infected. Close contact includes scenarios like living with or caring for a person with confirmed COVID-19, being within six feet of a person with confirmed COVID-19 for about 10 minutes, or if someone with COVID-19 coughed on you, kissed you, shared utensils with you or you had direct contact with their body secretions.

• If you may have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 but are not sick
  • Monitor your health for fever, cough and shortness of breath for 14 days after your last contact with the ill person.
  • Do not go to school or work. Avoid public places for 14 days.

• If you are a close contact of a person with confirmed COVID-19 and are sick
  • If you are sick with fever, cough, or shortness of breath, even if your symptoms are mild, isolate yourself.
• If you are at higher risk for severe illness (over 60, with underlying health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes), have a weakened immune system or are pregnant) call your health care provider. They may want to test you for COVID-19.
• If you have symptoms but are not in a high risk category, talk with your health care provider. They will help you determine if you need to be evaluated.

What to do if you have COVID-19 symptoms but haven’t been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19
• The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. These can be symptoms of other respiratory illnesses as well as COVID-19.
• If you are in a high-risk category, and have symptoms of COVID-19, call your healthcare provider for advice. If you are at risk for serious illness, your healthcare provider may arrange a test for COVID-19.
• If you do not have a high risk condition and your symptoms are mild, you do not need to be tested for COVID-19. Do not go out when you are sick, practice excellent hygiene, and wear a facemask when you are around other people if you can.
• Cover coughs and sneezes. Avoid sharing personal household items. Clean your hands often. Clean all “high-touch” surfaces like doorknobs often.
• Monitor your symptoms and call your health care provider if symptoms worsen.
• Stay home and avoid others for 72 hours after your fever goes down and symptoms get better.

For more detailed information or to print these recommendations and share them with others click on the following links:
• What to do if you have confirmed or suspected COVID-19
• What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed COVID-19
• What to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19 and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19

About testing

Currently, the capacity for testing in Washington state is inadequate for the number of people who want to be tested. Therefore, only people at highest risk for serious illness are likely to be tested currently. That should change
as soon as tomorrow as the public health system and private laboratories increase testing capacity.

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All King County residents should follow this advice:

1) Do not go to the emergency room unless essential. Emergency rooms need to be able to serve those with the most critical needs. If you have symptoms like cough, fever, or other respiratory problems, contact your regular doctor first.

2) Stay home when sick.

3) Practice excellent personal hygiene habits, including handwashing, coughing into tissue or elbow, avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth.

4) Stay away from people who are ill, especially if you are 60 and older or have underlying health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, or a weakened immune system, or if you are pregnant.

4) Stay informed. Information is changing frequently. Check and subscribe to Public Health’s website (www.kingcounty.gov/COVID) or blog (www.publichealthinsider.com).

Remember to take every day preventive action such as washing hands, and if you are sick stay home. During an outbreak with a new virus there is a lot of uncertainty. Our guidance and advice is subject to change as we learn more. We will continue to keep you updated.