Ulster County Frequently Asked Questions

COVID-19

Please keep in mind that the situation with COVID-19 is evolving, so our response is consequently fluid. Information is subject to change. While we are striving to keep the public up-to-date, we are also focusing our efforts on identifying medical and resource needs for the larger Ulster County community.

What is COVID-19?

In December 2019, a new respiratory disease called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was detected in China. COVID-19 is caused by a virus (SARS-CoV-2) that is part of a large family of viruses called coronaviruses.

The U.S. reported the first confirmed instance of person-to-person spread with this virus on January 30, 2020. New York has now confirmed its first cases of person-to-person spread with this virus March 3, 2020.

While some individuals ill with the virus may be asymptomatic or have mild illness, older individuals, particularly those with underlying health conditions, have shown greater susceptibility to the virus and can experience more serious illness and outcomes.

The incubation period of the virus is currently thought to be between 2-14 days, so many recommendations are in alignment with that timeframe.

How is COVID-19 treated?

According to the CDC, not all patients with COVID-19 will require medical supportive care. Clinical management for hospitalized patients with COVID-19 is focused on supportive care from complications. There are currently no antiviral drugs licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat COVID-19.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest). Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person when droplets produced by an infected person's cough or sneeze lands in the mouths or noses of nearby people and possibly inhaled into the lungs.

How do I know if I have COVID-19?

The primary indicators of COVID-19 are shortness of breath, fever, cough, history of travel to a highly affected area, or direct exposure to someone who has been diagnosed. Secondary

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symptoms of COVID-19, like fever, fatigue, body aches, cough, and worsening symptoms, could be the flu.

How can I get a test to see if I have COVID-19?

Laboratories are not capable of administering COVID-19 tests for everyone who thinks that they need a test. And it is not always necessary to test for COVID-19.

Anyone who is feeling ill should stay home to avoid the possibility of spreading infection. Avoid unnecessary contact with other household members if possible. Monitor your symptoms and, if you feel that you need medical assistance, reach out to your primary care doctor. If you do not have a primary care doctor, reach out to a local urgent care center or hospital. In case of a medical emergency, dial 911.

If your symptoms are severe, or if you have an underlying medical condition, such as heart disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes or a compromised immune system, call your doctor to discuss the possibility of testing to rule out other possible viral infections, such as the flu.

Only in the event of a medical emergency should you attempt to visit the hospital, urgent care facility, or your doctor's office. PLEASE CALL IN ADVANCE TO ASSESS WITH A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL BEFORE VISITING A MEDICAL FACILITY.

Hospitals and urgent care facilities are very busy dealing with patients who require urgent medical attention. COVID-19 is not considered life-threating for most patients. The best option for the time-being is to rest at home until 48 hours after your symptoms have passed.

I'm getting tested for COVID-19. Now what?

The latest guidelines state that patients undergoing testing for COVID-19 must self-isolate until they receive a negative COVID-19 test result.

HOWEVER, persons with a negative COVID-19 test result should CONTINUE TO SELF-ISOLATE if they have traveled recently to a highly impacted area for 14 days after last travel or exposure.

If COVID-19 testing results are positive, patients must be on mandatory quarantine, so contact the Ulster County Health Department via the COVID-19 Hotline at 845-443-8888.

Persons with a negative COVID-19 test result who have not traveled or been directly exposed to a known case, may be advised to discontinue self-isolation.

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What's the difference between quarantine and isolation?

For Ulster County purposes, quarantine is a designation by the Department of Health for a person who is being investigated/monitored/tested for COVID-19. Isolation is a recommendation to protect the public.

Per the NYS Department of Health, confirmed cases of COVID-19 are mandated quarantines in contact with local Health Departments. Persons in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 are required to be in isolation if they were in *direct contact* (within 6 feet of a person displaying symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19). Persons in contact are required to be in precautionary quarantine if *proximate contact* (within the same enclosed environment but greater than 6 feet from a person displaying symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19).

- Mandatory Quarantine applies to:
    - Patients with confirmed COVID-19 (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic).
    - Asymptomatic persons who have been in close contact (<6 ft) with someone who is a known to have COVID-19 (discontinued 14 days after last known exposure).
    - Patients who traveled to CDC Level 2 or 3 Health Alert countries and are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 within 14 days of affected area.

- Precautionary Quarantine applies to:
    - Asymptomatic traveler from a CDC Level 2 or 3 Health Alert country with widespread sustained transmission of COVID-19 (discontinued 14 days after last travel date to affected area).
    - Asymptomatic person who had proximate exposure (but not direct, close contact) to a confirmed COVID-19 case (discontinued 14 days after last known exposure).
    - Healthcare providers should call the Local Health Department of the patient's residence with questions about patients and their monitoring or movement restrictions.

Persons in contact with someone who was in contact with a COVID-19 patient are not subject to quarantine but should follow recommendations for social distancing. That includes household members who are asymptomatic and community members or co-workers who are asymptomatic.

I heard something on social media. How do I find out if it's true?

The County is updating the public through press releases, press conferences, telephone Town Halls with County Executive Pat Ryan, official County social media accounts, and interacting

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with the public directly through our COVID-19 Hotline at 845-443-8888. Please use these channels to stay up to date.

Please keep in mind that statements on unofficial social media accounts and discussion of rumors diverts resources that could be otherwise used for stemming the spread of COVID-19.

How do I know if I've been exposed?

The Ulster County Department of Health has public health nurses who are engaged in **community tracing**. When we get a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19, a public health nurse will trace community contacts to identify direct exposure and assess the need for follow up.

What about the school districts?

In consultation with the Health Department and the Ulster County Health and Safety Advisory Task Force, and out of an abundance of caution, the Ulster County Executive has directed the closure of all schools in Ulster County for 14 days, starting on Monday, March 16th, 2020.

Ulster County school districts are working to continue their food programs for low-income families. Please refer to your local school district for more information.

According to the latest guidance from NYSED, when a student or staff member who attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case, New York State Department of Health requires an initial 24-hour closure in order to disinfect the building and begin an investigation to determine the contacts that the individual may have had within the school environment.

Students and faculty returning from currently impacted countries or regions of impacted countries are required by the State Department of Health to be under precautionary quarantine for 14 days upon return. This includes school sponsored travel or individual travel (spring break).

What about upcoming events?

New York State has banned gatherings of 500 or more people across the state "for the foreseeable future." This guidance is not intended for governmental, medical, educational, retail spaces, or mass transportation facilities. Large gatherings and public spaces that are intended within the scope of this guidance include, but are not limited to theaters, auditoriums, concerts, conferences, worship services, sporting events, restaurants, bars, gaming establishments, and physical fitness centers.

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Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan has declared a State of Emergency, and the Department of Health is strongly recommending all non-essential indoor events be canceled or postponed for at least through March 25, particularly events with 50 or more expected attendees.

Seniors and people with underlying conditions are encouraged stay home.

As of March 16, 2020, the New York, New Jersey, Connecticut Tri-State Approach requires crowd capacity to be reduced to 50, and restaurants/bars to close for on-premises service and operate with takeout/delivery ONLY (these establishments will be provided a waiver for carry-out alcohol). Gyms, movie theaters, and casinos are closed. Grocery stores will remain open.

NYS will waive all NYS park fees in State, local, and county parks so people can get out in an environment that is not dense with people. The Governor directed non-essential state employees statewide to work from home. The Governor also directed local governments to reduce their overall workforce by 50% and allow nonessential employees to work from home. Businesses asked to close at 8 pm except for grocery, pharmacies, and medical.

As of March 16, 2020, the CDC says that during the next 15 days, all US events of 10+ people *should be* cancelled or held virtually. For organizations that serve people who are at higher risk of serious COVID-19 illness, cancel events for groups of 10 people or more.

What should I do about my business?

On March 16th, Governor Andrew Cuomo directed nonessential state employees statewide to work from home. Businesses asked to close at 8 pm except for grocery, pharmacies, and medical.

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, regularly clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces. Procedures and supplies should be in place to encourage proper hand and respiratory hygiene, and to avoid close contact with people who are sick. Encourage people to stay home when they are sick. Employers may discuss opportunities for employees to work at home for a period of time.

Institutions and facilities should review and update their current emergency plans and procedures. This should include updating contact information and communicating with vendors who supply critical products or services to plan for continuation of those services throughout this situation. Critical services may include food service and hygiene supplies. This planning is especially important since suppliers could also be affected by COVID-19.

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Will the County share information about each confirmed case?

Due to privacy and confidentiality laws, the County will not disclose personally identifiable information regarding suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Will the County provide resources to agencies and people who need them?

Given the recommendation to socially distance and self-isolate, there are naturally concerns around getting food to people who need it.

The County's Office of the Aging has temporarily suspended its congregate meal programs for seniors and is working on back-up plans for meal delivery programs like Meals on Wheels.

Many of our Ulster County school districts provide meals to low-income children, and those districts are working on plans for those programs. Residents can follow their school districts to learn more about that.

Others who are in need of assistance with the procurement of food while self-isolating, can put in a request through the County's COVID-19 Hotline. The Hotline can also take information about people interested in volunteering to help with food distribution. Area food pantries and community organizations are working to help.

Agencies looking for masks and other resources must deplete their stock to an estimated 10-day supply and show that they are unable to re-supply through normal suppliers. If your agency needs specific supplies or resources, you can submit your request to the Ulster County Emergency Operations Center by email to eoc@co.ulster.ny.us.

What is the County doing about public services?

The County is limiting access to public offices and locations, including the Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Social Services, Office for the Aging, Veteran Services Agency, and the Office of Employment and Training. For phone and online options, please see our fliers.

For Service Updates for Probation and Pretrial Release Program, the Restorative Justice and Community Empowerment Center, Community Service, and the Crime Victims Assistance Program, and the Stop DWI program, see the fliers.

The County's public transit system, UCAT, has a procedure in place for regular disinfection of area buses to protect riders and County employees. There are current route adjustments, so please see the flier.

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ABOUT PROJECT RESILIENCE

Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan announced March 17 the formation of a new countywide effort – Project Resilience – to help direct the surge of support and goodwill towards those in need throughout the county. Project Resilience includes:

- a community fund, in partnership with the United Way
- an online portal for anyone in need to ask for help
- a robust food distribution network
- a partnership program for businesses and community groups to provide food and other critical services

To donate, request meal delivery and assistance, or to sign up as a participating business or service provider, fill out the corresponding forms on our website.

What can I do to help?

The best thing for people to do right now to help stem the spread of COVID-19 is avoid non-essential group settings, to practice regular hand and respiratory hygiene, and stay home and, if possible, isolated from family and animals when sick.

What is social distancing?

Because the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, it is recommended that people practice social distancing: maintain a 6-foot distance from each other when in group settings, stay home and avoid contact with others, and avoid group settings and public transportation when possible.

I'm not sick. Should I still stay home?

When healthy people practice social distancing (maintaining a 6-foot distance from others) for the incubation period of COVID-19 (currently thought to be 2-14 days), it reduces the number of people who can be directly exposed to Coronavirus. This allows County and health care resources to remain focused on providing guidance and assistance to people who need it. Staying home as much as possible, in alignment with the latest recommendations, helps us stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect people who are most vulnerable.

For additional information, please visit the State's website and read the latest CDC guidelines.

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