MEDIA RELEASE

Orange County Health Department Encourages the Community to Increase Preparedness Measures for COVID-19

March 5, 2020. HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. – As of March 3, 2020, there is one confirmed case of COVID-19 in North Carolina, in Wake County. **There are no confirmed cases in Orange County, North Carolina at the time of this press release.**

The Orange County Health Department (OCHD) and Orange County Emergency Services (OCES) are closely monitoring the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and are planning accordingly. Quintana Stewart, Orange County Health Department Health Director, says, "We are working with the North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services (NCDHHS), North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM), local health care providers, first responders, local schools and universities, county and municipal partners to make sure we have resources needed to respond. **So far, careful containment efforts have given us valuable time to plan and prepare.**"

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is urging communities to prepare now, said Orange County Health Director Quintana Stewart. "This is a rapidly evolving situation," she said, urging residents to check reliable news sources and the county's **Coronavirus webpage** for continued updates.

The following are practical measures all North Carolinians can take to prepare for potential widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the state:

Individuals, Families and Communities

The Orange County Health Department (OCHD) recommends everyone continue taking precautions to protect themselves and others from the spread of respiratory illnesses, which includes COVID-19.

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, and for at least 20 seconds each time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not reuse tissue after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.

It is also good practice to start being more aware of the number of times a day your hands touch an object or hard surface and then touch your face without being washed. Limiting the exposure of your nose, mouth and eyes to unwashed hands can help to protect from the spread of all germs and illnesses.

Have a plan in case you need to miss work or other responsibilities due to personal illness or to care for a sick family member. For pregnant people and children, review the information and **guidance available on the CDC website.**

Businesses and Employers

- Practice good hand hygiene and encourage your employees and patrons to take common-sense precautions to protect themselves from the spread of respiratory illnesses.
- Review your policies and procedures for remote or teleworking where possible.
- Cross-train employees for key functions so that daily schedules can continue relatively uninterrupted by potential employee absences.
- Review absenteeism policies to make sure employees are not being encouraged to come to work if they are sick.
- If you have not already, establish a relationship with the **Orange County Health Department**. If you are an individual or a medical practice with questions about COVID-19, call the Orange County Health Department at 919-245-2400 and ask to get in touch with someone from Communicable Disease Team (CD). Afterhours, call 911 and ask for the Communicable Disease Staff member on-call.
- Look for more updates and guidance for businesses available on **the CDC website**.

Health Care Providers and Hospitals

- Review policies and procedures for infection prevention and mitigation, and make sure that all employees are aware of and following the appropriate steps.
- Consider how to maximize the use of telemedicine, nurse triage lines and other options to prevent sick people from coming to clinics and emergency rooms if they have mild illness and do not need treatment.
- Continue implementing the **NCDHHS and CDC guidance** for COVID-19 and continue working closely with the Orange County Health Department and NCDHHS.
- Look for more updates and information for health care professionals on **the CDC website**.

College, Universities, K-12 Schools and Child Care Facilities

- Make sure all students, faculty and staff are aware of and practicing good hand hygiene and taking common-sense precautions to protect from the spread of respiratory illnesses.
- Review absenteeism policies and procedures to make sure students or children, faculty and staff are not being encouraged to attend or work if they are sick.
- If you have not already, establish a relationship with the **Orange County Health Department** and communicate with us if you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19.
- Learn more about COVID-19 on **the CDC website**, and look for updates and information for schools, colleges and childcare.

Stewart says, "As a community, we need to be mindful of xenophobia (dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries). As this novel coronavirus spreads, so does xenophobia. We want to avoid any speech or action that would make minorities in our community feel exposed and vulnerable. Pathogens and viruses do not discriminate, however

humans do. The Orange County Health Department will not contribute to racial profiling and marginalization, portraying the carrier of this illness as 'foreign and alien.' We will stick to the science and treat all community members with respect."

Orange County can better prepare for COVID-19 by getting up-to-date information directly from reliable sources like NCDHHS and the CDC. The COVID-19 outbreak has been accompanied by a global flood of misinformation from unreliable sources. Be thoughtful about what you read or hear about the virus and make sure you are separating rumor from fact before you act.

If You Suspect You May have COVID-19

If you have traveled recently to an area where there is a known outbreak of the coronavirus called COVID-19, have a fever and/or cough and difficulty breathing, or have had close contact with a person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 in the last 14 days before your symptoms began, please call your doctor. Follow this guidance:

• Seek medical care right away. **Before you go to visit your medical provider, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.**
• Avoid contact with others.
• Avoid non-essential travel while sick.
• Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
• Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
All Orange County medical personnel and first responders have been informed about COVID-19 and have put in place a protocol to ensure the public's safety.

For more information on COVID-19:
• CDC's website: cdc.gov/coronavirus
• North Carolina Division of Public Health: ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus
• Orange County Health Department: orangecountync.gov/coronavirus

If you are an individual or a medical practice with questions about COVID-19 call the Orange County Health Department at 919-245-2400.

For the public with general questions (not urgent) about COVID-19, contact NCDHHS at:
• ncresponse@dhhs.nc.gov
• 1-866-462-3821
• To submit questions online, go to www.ncpoisoncontrol.org and select "chat."

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