

MEDIA RELEASE

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Orange County Identifies First Cases of COVID-19

HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. March 20, 2020 – Orange County, North Carolina persons have tested positive for novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The tests, conducted by the [North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health](#), are positive. The people are doing well and are in isolation at home.

“I know that people are worried about this virus, and I want to assure the Orange County community members that we are prepared,” said Orange County Health Department (OCHD), Health Director, Quintana Stewart. “With the global spread of this virus we anticipated that we would eventually identify a case here in Orange County. To prepare we have been working closely with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) Orange County EMS (OEMS), health care providers and others to quickly identify and respond to cases that might occur.”

Most people impacted by COVID-19 experience mild symptoms with a full recovery in about a week. Because COVID-19 is most commonly spread through respiratory droplets, the public should take the same measures that healthcare providers recommend annually to prevent the spread of the flu and other viruses, including washing hands, avoiding touching your face and covering coughs and sneezes.

On Thursday, March 19, Governor Roy Cooper announced the first documented case of community transmission, meaning the individual tested positive with no travel history to an impacted area and no close contact with a positive confirmed COVID-19 case.

Stewart said, “This new information has shifted our response efforts from containment to mitigation. The goal is to slow the transmission of disease and protect our high-risk population and healthcare and critical infrastructure workforces.”

In response to COVID-19 our community will:

- Continue to engage in daily collaboration with federal, state and local partners to ensure a rapid response.
- Continue to mobilize resources for our providers, public health system, emergency management and others.
- Continue to develop detailed response plans for multiple sectors for a range of scenarios.

- Prepare health care providers and facilities to streamline and standardize response activities.
- Continue to work with our Joint Information Center to provide timely information. The most current and comprehensive information may be found at www.orangecountync.gov/Coronavirus

Chair of the Board of County Commissioners, Penny Rich said, “No one knows for certain how many of us will get sick, but the CDC says that in the coming months, most of the U.S. population will be exposed to this virus. To put this in perspective, in Orange County, we have approximately 146,000 people. If 20% of us become infected with COVID-19, approximately 30,000 people in our community will get sick, and some of our residents may die from the disease. **That is why social distancing is so important.** It slows the rate at which people become sick. It will buy us time and flatten the curve.”

Residents who are at greatest risk of serious or fatal complications include people who are 60 years old and older, as well as people who have any sort of health condition. High risk conditions include heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease.

Rich said, “Our medical and healthcare systems are strong, but they are not designed to handle a surge of our population becoming sick all at once. Social distancing will buy us time and flatten the curve. In other words, keeping 6 to 8 feet apart from one another, and adhering to social distancing guidelines is the most important way to show that you care about our Orange County community. It will allow our medical system to catch up and will greatly reduce the number of people who get sick.”

Please avoid the following:

- Group gatherings
- Sleepovers
- Playdates
- Traveling
- Church services
- Visitors in your house
- Non-essential workers in your house

Please keep your distance when you:

- Visit a local restaurant to get take out
- Visit a grocery store
- Pick up medications
- Or spend time outside in public spaces

It is safe to do the following:

- Take a walk. The health department has [created stickers](#) that say, “Six feet apart, please.” This is a polite way to remind each other that during the next month or so, we need to give each other a wide berth.
- It is ok to do yard work.
- Use this time to clean out a closet or read a good book. Listen to music, have a family game night or stream a favorite show.
- Remain connected with friends and neighbors, but do so via phone or email. A video chat is a great way to combat social isolation.

The County is staffing a phone line for questions about COVID-19. The number is 919-245-6111 and is available from 8:30 to 5:00 seven days a week. Spanish language and other languages are available. Please visit the coronavirus website at www.orangecountync.gov/coronavirus. To receive daily text updates on the crisis, please text ocnhealth to 888777. You may also sign up for a twice weekly e-newsletter about the COVID-19 response via our website. Please follow the Orange County Health Department on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

NCDHHS’ website www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus, will include future positive COVID-19 test results in North Carolina.

In lieu of a traditional press conference, and in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines, Health Director, Quintana Stewart, along with Chair of the Board of County Commissioners, Penny Rich, prepared a video release: <https://youtu.be/3NwXEjjKPOI>

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