

## **Speaking Notes for Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Vera Etches Briefing to Ottawa City Council - January 29, 2020**

(Check against delivery)

Mayor Watson and Members of Council,

Kwe, bonjour, merci de m'accorder cette opportunité d'offrir une mise à jour au sujet du nouveau coronavirus.

As many are aware, Wuhan, China reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia on December 31, 2019, which were later confirmed as caused by a new type of coronavirus not previously identified in humans.

Ottawa Public Health is following the lead of the Ontario Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario and the Public Health Agency of Canada in responding to the Novel Coronavirus, with a focus on keeping the people of Ottawa well.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. They can cause infections ranging from the common cold to more severe infections such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS. Symptoms of infection with this new coronavirus range from mild to severe respiratory illnesses, including fever, cough, runny nose and shortness of breath. Les symptômes de l'infection sont la fièvre, la toux, le nez qui coule et les difficultés respiratoires. Complications can cause pneumonia and deaths are mainly being reported in older adults with underlying chronic disease.

Chinese officials in Wuhan as well as other cities in Hubei Province are implementing exceptional measures to reduce further spread of the virus. Given the safety and security risks associated with these measures, the Government of Canada recommends that Canadians [avoid all travel](#) to Hubei province, China.

At this time, the population at risk for infection with the novel coronavirus is people who have visited Wuhan and the surrounding province of Hubei and people who have been in close contact with someone who has a respiratory illness who has been to the Hubei province within 14 days prior to their illness onset. The 14 days is the maximum incubation period observed for this virus. The incubation period is the time between when someone was exposed to the virus and infected and the time when symptoms first appear. The typical incubation period for the novel coronavirus appears to be more like a few days, though information is evolving.

There are travelers who have returned from the affected area who were screened in airports in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver and who were given messaging about how

to take precautions to limit exposure to others if they develop symptoms in the 14 days after their return.

Ottawa Public Health has strong partnerships with local hospitals, which test for the novel coronavirus, and we are sharing provincial guidance to support primary health care providers in the community. I can confirm that rigorous processes are in place to screen individuals suspected of novel coronavirus exposure; people undergoing assessment are isolated and employees are protected from infection. We have information on our website and we are receiving phone calls to guide health care practitioners as well as members of the public regarding assessment for novel coronavirus. I encourage all who visit a hospital to read and follow instructions on hospital signage.

As of last evening, about 40 people in Ontario have been investigated with a lab test to rule out or detect infection with the novel coronavirus, given their history of travel to an affected area or exposure to someone ill who traveled to an affected area. Most of these tests have been negative. Two cases have been identified in Toronto. There has been one instance in the City of Ottawa where the decision was made to order the lab test to rule out the novel coronavirus. If this test becomes positive, I will be communicating about this.

If a confirmed case of the novel coronavirus were to be identified in Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health would work with the Ministry of Health, the Public Health Ontario Laboratory, and local hospitals in the management of the case and any contacts. Of the three confirmed or presumptive cases in Canada, all are doing well.

As I mentioned earlier, this situation is evolving and prevention of transmission of the respiratory virus is key. There are things that residents can and should do to reduce the spread of infection, which are useful for limiting the spread of influenza, which is present in our community at this time.

I recommend that everyone:

- Wash your hands and wash them often with soap and water, or use alcohol hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth unless you have just washed your hands
- Cover your cough and please sneeze with a tissue or into your arm, not into your hands
- And if possible, stay home if you are sick

On recommande de vous laver souvent les mains à l'eau et au savon ou d'utiliser un désinfectant pour les mains, évitez de vous toucher les yeux, le nez et la bouche sauf si vous venez de vous laver les mains, couvrez votre toux et vos éternuements avec un mouchoir ou avec votre bras, et si possible restez à la maison si vous êtes malade.

- Avoid visiting people in hospitals or long-term care centres if you are sick
- And it is still important to get your flu shot as the influenza season is ongoing

You will have likely seen in the media discussion surrounding face masks. In Ottawa, there is no reason to wear a mask if you are well. Masks can provide a false sense of security, as people continue to touch the masks and then their face. The best advice is to wash your hands frequently and refrain from touching your face.

The health and safety of our population is my priority. Ma priorité est la santé et la sécurité de notre population.

The Ottawa Public Health team has activated an incident management structure to focus efforts on being vigilant to detect and limit spread of the novel coronavirus. Ottawa Public Health is keeping a close watch on the evolving situation and responding in collaboration with partners. I will keep the public updated.

I will now ask my colleague, Tony Di Monte, to speak to the paramedics' response in Ottawa. We are both happy to answer any questions.