



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

PLEASE POST

The coronavirus: here's what HEU members need to know to stay safe

Public health officials around the world are tracking a new coronavirus that appears to have originated in Wuhan, China. The virus, known as 2019 Novel Coronavirus or 2019-nCoV, has not previously been identified in humans.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2019-nCoV a public health emergency, it's important to note, at this time, B.C. public health officials continue to assess the risk of 2019-nCoV spreading within the province as low.

As B.C.'s health system prepares for the early detection and containment of further cases of 2019-nCoV, the Hospital Employees' Union is in close contact with public health officials and employers to ensure the safety of health care workers.

HEU has joined other health unions for briefings with B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry, health employer representatives, and health authority OH&S directors. These briefings will continue on a regular basis for as long as needed.

We expect health authorities and other health employers will provide timely, specific and clear direction to health care workers on the infection control protocols they will follow to avoid exposure to the virus.

Health employers are also expected to have sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on hand for health care workers, and provide the training to use it, including fit-testing for respirators as required.

With the proliferation of contracted-out services in many of our hospitals, the union has told health officials they must take steps to ensure hospital cleaning, dietary and laundry contractors are clearly instructed on infection control protocols and PPE requirements in response to the coronavirus threat.

It is the health employer's responsibility to ensure workers are properly informed and equipped to work in environments where there's risk of exposure. Workers should always apply a precautionary approach to their work, and consult a supervisor with any questions about protocols or PPE.

What are the symptoms of 2019 Novel Coronavirus, and what do I do if I suspect symptoms in myself or others?

Symptoms of the Novel Coronavirus have included fever, cough, shortness of breath, or

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difficulty breathing. These symptoms may appear two to 14 days after exposure. If you have traveled to Wuhan, China and develop symptoms of 2019 Novel Coronavirus infection, avoid contact with others and contact a health care professional with the following information:

- your symptoms;
- where you have been travelling or living;
- if you had direct contact with animals (for example, at a live animal market); and
- if you had close contact with a sick person, especially if they had a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.

What we know about virus transmission to date:

Coronaviruses cause infections of the nose, throat and lungs. They are most commonly spread from an infected person in the following ways:

- close contact with someone coughing and sneezing;
- close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands; and
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

Preventing coronavirus infection:

- There are currently no vaccines available to protect you against human coronavirus infection. You can reduce your risk of infection by doing the following:
- Follow your work site or unit infection control policies. If you are unsure about what's needed, talk to your supervisor, before doing the task you are assigned.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wear the required PPE for "droplet and contact precautions" before interacting with a confirmed patient or a patient under assessment.
- For completing activities with a confirmed patient or a patient under assessment, ensure you're wearing PPE including gloves, long-sleeved gown, a mask, and eye or face protection.
- Ask for training or a refresher on how to put on, take off, and dispose of PPE correctly.
- If you do not have the PPE you need, stop and speak with your supervisor.
- If your concerns are not addressed, please speak with your shop steward or worker representative on the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee.
- If you think you've been exposed, such as skin contact with secretions, report to your employer using their incident report process.

The coronavirus situation is changing on a daily basis. Please check our website for updates.