

Date: Thursday, January 16, 2020

To: Central Zone Family Physicians and Emergency Department Staff

From: Dr. Ifeoma Achebe, Medical Officer of Health – Central Zone

Context:

On December 31, 2019, the Wuhan (a city in China) Municipal Health Commission in the Hubei province issued a public statement that they had identified a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause. Chinese authorities have since been able to isolate a novel strain of coronavirus (nCoV) from these cases. Other respiratory pathogens have been ruled out as a cause. Most cases were either workers or visitors to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market located in Wuhan.

Chinese authorities reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) that a total of 41 cases of nCoV positive pneumonia cases have been identified up to January 12, and all cases had symptom onsets before January 3. The clinical symptoms were mainly fever with a few cases reporting difficulty breathing. Chest radiographs showed invasive pneumonic infiltrates in both lungs. Seven of these cases are reported as being severely ill and one patient has died. The person who died had serious pre-existing health problems.

No cases of nCoV infection have been identified in 763 close contacts followed up by Chinese authorities. Although the WHO indicates it is possible that there is limited human-to-human transmission, potentially among families, there is no sustained human-to-human transmission.

There has been one reported case of nCoV illness in a traveler. This case traveled from Wuhan to Thailand. This person is reported as recovering from the illness.

It should be recognized that there are a number of common respiratory viruses currently circulating in Alberta and globally. The most likely cause of a respiratory infection in either a resident or a traveler will be one of these viruses. It is important to reinforce that the current nCoV risk to Albertans is very low given that there is limited evidence of human-to-human transmission and the common source of infection appears to be one fish market in Wuhan, China.

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers:

- Healthcare providers are reminded to maintain droplet precautions when they are providing care to patients presenting with any mild or severe respiratory illness in order to prevent spread to themselves, clinic staff and other patients.
- Healthcare providers should immediately **contact the Zone Medical Officer of Health (MOH) on-call** when presented with a patient who has an acute respiratory condition plus a history of travel to Wuhan, China within **14 days prior** to the onset of symptoms. The MOH will provide direction on laboratory sample collection and will coordinate nCoV testing through the Public Health Laboratory.
- Please continue to report severe respiratory illness in any returning traveler where no causative agent is identified within 72 hours.

Additional References:

- WHO: <https://www.who.int/csr/don/12-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-china/en/>
- Public Health Agency of Canada update on Pneumonia of Unknown Cause in China:
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories/pneumonia-china>

If you have further questions, please contact the Central Zone MOH on-call at 403-356-6430.