

3-16-20

Coronavirus News Conference

Good morning. Thank you all for joining us, and thank you to those tuning in via our various news outlets and social media.

As concerns about the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, have grown rapidly in recent days, the City of Norfolk and area public health officials, as well as our education and community partners have remained in close contact and communication. On Friday afternoon, those standing here with me today – representing public health agencies, health care provider systems, schools, community centers, and public safety emergency service operators - had an extensive discussion about the threat of this virus and the importance of collective action to mitigate its spread and the impacts of its spread. We want to take the opportunity this morning to update you about those discussions and decisions that have been made in the interests of public safety.

First, let's be clear: Currently, there are no confirmed cases of coronavirus in Norfolk or Madison County. Several individuals have undergone testing protocols but none have yet to be found to have tested positive. However, statewide, 18 positives have been reported, including one in Douglas County over the weekend, which is considered to be the first case of "community spread" in the state, meaning the individual was determined to have had symptoms of the virus prior to any recent travel.

Given these facts, and having the benefit of seeing how quickly the virus has spread in other communities and regions to date, it was determined that careful, strategic collective action should be taken to keep Norfolkans and northeast Nebraskans safe.

Let's also be clear about why precautionary actions are important and deemed necessary. Our health officials will expand upon this, but in a nutshell: This is a new viral strain of which no one has immunity; it spreads relatively quickly and indiscriminately. Precautions are meant to mitigate impact, or "flatten the curve" – a phrase you've no doubt heard by now - to prevent a spike of sudden cases that can overwhelm our healthcare systems. The virus is most dangerous to our elderly populations and those with existing health conditions. The more we can slow the

spread and limit exposure to these populations – and therefore keep our medical care providers from being inundated - the better outcomes for everyone.

What we know is that smart and vigilant personal hygiene, social distancing, or limiting close exposure to others, and curtailing large gatherings of people can all work together to slow the spread of the virus and limit the severity of its impact - not only in Norfolk but also throughout the surrounding region.

With that in mind, the City of Norfolk is taking special action to play its part. Large community-sponsored events, such as the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast which is held each year near Easter and draws hundreds of people throughout our community and area, is being postponed to a later date. We are also cancelling, for now, programming at the City library, as well as restricting building access, and we are taking special precautions through new practices to safeguard the health of first responders and other essential, front-lines city personnel to ensure continuity of public services.

Just over a year ago, I stood at this very podium and spoke to the community about the threat of unprecedented flooding. That was a trying time for all of us. But, because of strategic planning and prudent action on the part of past leaders, the expertise of our public safety officers, the smart utilization and employment of available resources, and – very importantly – a strong sense of “neighbor helping neighbor” throughout the city, we pulled through a tragedy of historic proportions largely unscathed. Today, this threat, one of a much different and more nebulous form, will require similar resolve, planning, and citizen and neighbor cooperation.

I have no doubt we'll come through this - with the same kind of mindfulness of being neighborly and looking out for those most vulnerable around us. How can you do this? Be proactive, smart and vigilant about your health and your family's health. If you feel unwell, stay home. Practice good hygiene with aggressive cleanliness and hand washing and limit your exposure and proximity to others. Do this not only for yourself, but for those around you who may very well be more susceptible to the worst of this disease.

Also keep this in mind: While we're now taking uncommon precautions, life does not need to stop. Many employees will be able to continue their work from home, or their workplace, and many students will be able to continue their studies from

home. In the meantime, our small businesses still need your support. As we are smart and careful as to how we move about and protect ourselves and others in the community, we can also continue to be active and creative in utilizing the services and buying the goods we need from our small businesses.

With the team assembled, I am confident we are as well-positioned here as anywhere to meet this unfamiliar challenge. And that is thanks to the expertise and commitment of our public health officials, health care providers, education leaders, community partners and public safety team, all of whom are represented here and will be sharing with you updates from their respective fields. Before I introduce them, I want to point you to important sources of information you can use to stay informed of developments about coronavirus and community updates: first is the city of Norfolk website at www.norfolkne.gov. At our homepage you will find links to sources of information from the Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization. This information is also accessible in Spanish and other languages.

Now, for further updates, I would like to call forward . . .

Public Health and Health Care Providers

Melanie Thompson, Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department

Kelly Driscoll, CEO of Faith Regional Health Services

Dr. Fua Menseh, FRHS Infectious Disease Specialist

Kathy Nordby, Director of Midtown Health Center

Education Partners

Dr. Jami Jo Thompson, NPS

Dr. Leah Barrett, NECC

Community Partners

Randy Hagedorn, YMCA

Denise Wilkinson, Norfolk Area Chamber of Commerce

Public Safety and Regional Emergency Service Operators

Shane Weidner, City of Norfolk