March 13, 2020

Dear Faith Leaders,

The Faith-Based Community can take actions now to help to protect your worshippers and staff from the spread of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. We understand that the Novel Coronavirus, now known as COVID-19, is causing anxiety in our community. We are working to provide you with the most up to date information on this rapidly changing situation. Following is a brief overview of the current situation. For more information and FAQ’s, please visit https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina/covid-19, or directly from reliable sources like Macon County Public Health, NCDHHS, and the CDC.

WHAT IS KNOWN

- The virus causing COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified and causes a respiratory illness ranging from a mild cold-like illness to severe pneumonia.
- Most (81%) of people diagnosed with COVID-19 in China had mild disease, including most children.
- Similar to influenza, the people who are most likely to develop severe disease and complications from COVID-19 are older individuals (>65 years old) and those with other medical conditions like heart and lung disease or diabetes.
- There is no vaccine or treatment currently available for COVID-19, but the National Institutes of Health is evaluating treatments and developing a vaccine.
- Currently, a small number of North Carolina individuals in the Triangle area have tested presumptively positive for novel coronavirus, or #COVID19. COVID-19 is currently not widespread in North Carolina.
- However, experts predict there will eventually be community spread. MCPH is preparing for when this happens.

HOW THE VIRUS SPREADS

- COVID-19 is believed to spread primarily the same way the common cold or flu spreads—through respiratory droplets that are produced when someone coughs or sneezes.
- People who are most at risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 are those who have been in close contact (within about 6 feet) with someone who has the disease.
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread of the virus might be possible before a person has symptoms; there have been reports of this with COVID-19, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.
- COVID-19 can also live on surfaces for several days. Therefore, frequent cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces is very important.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Encourage congregation to stay home if they or a household member is sick.
- Consider the needs of older adults over 65+, persons with compromised immune systems, and other individuals with cancer, chronic disease such as heart, lung disease and diabetes.
- Provide and use supplies such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues and lined trash baskets.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissue or elbow.
• Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects (everyday household disinfectants are fine). See enclosed disinfectant mixing instructions.
• Increase cleaning of high touch surfaces like door knobs, toilet handles, prayer rails, and sink handles.
• Identify services or programs which might be limited to or temporarily dropped during an outbreak. EX. Youth functions, nursery, meals, and senior adult activities.
• If you offer communion during your service, consider the most sanitary way to offer the elements to your congregation.


For more information, or if you have questions, please contact Macon County Public Health at 828-349-2081.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding,

Carmine Rocco,
Macon County Health Director