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Emergency Declaration

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, March 04, 2020

Sponsored by: County Administrative Office

Streamlining sought for COVID-19 response

 Board of Commissioners Adopts Emergency Declaration

Washington County Health Officer Dr. Christina Baumann and Emergency Manager John Wheeler at a special meeting of the Board of Commissioners.

The Board of County Commissioners adopted [an emergency declaration](#) today allowing Washington County personnel greater flexibility and support as they work with partner agencies and the public to contain and prevent the further spread of the novel coronavirus causing the disease known as COVID-19.

The declaration specifically authorizes the county organization to:

- Seek state and federal assistance and potential reimbursement for local funds spent on COVID-19 response;
- Use streamlined processes for purchasing goods and services as allowed under Oregon law during emergency situations; and
- Follow emergency plans and procedures as may be needed to protect the public health within the scope of state law and the county's Charter and code.

The declaration would expire in two weeks, on March 18, but could be renewed by the Board if necessary. [The public can view the meeting by streaming video here.](#)

In addition, the County's emergency operations center (EOC) partially activated Tuesday to assist the Washington County Public Health Division with multi-agency coordination, public information and community outreach. The activation also provides a venue for mobilizing resources and developing plans across multiple Washington County departments.

The emergency declaration and EOC activation come after preliminary tests announced on February 28 showed that two Washington County residents contracted the new virus, the first two presumptive positive cases in Oregon. One of these two cases has since been confirmed positive by the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

“Our community is understandably concerned about this new virus and the impact it has been having here in the Pacific Northwest and around the world,” said County Board Chair Kathryn Harrington. “This emergency declaration does not indicate that the public is at any greater risk. The declaration is meant to give our county public health staff the flexibility and support it needs to quickly purchase supplies, organize our response over the weeks ahead and seek potential state and federal resources as they become available. Our full Board of Commissioners has great confidence in the work our county public health staff are doing, in partnership with our neighboring counties, the State of Oregon and federal agencies, and we want to give them every advantage this declaration can provide.”

The Washington County Public Health Division, part of the Health and Human Services Department, has been working closely with the [CDC](#), [Oregon Health Authority \(OHA\)](#) and public health agencies in neighboring [Clackamas](#) and [Multnomah](#) counties on prevention, monitoring and evaluation of persons who might have been exposed to the illness. The Washington County Public Health Division has also been coordinating over the last several weeks with local health care providers, schools, businesses and others to educate, inform and dispel rumors around COVID-19.

“This emergency declaration will help our Public Health Division with additional resources as we continue to pursue our local role of investigating potential cases, monitoring the spread of illness, coordinating with our partner agencies and medical providers and keeping the public informed,” said Tricia Mortell, division manager for Washington County Public Health. “Although concerning, the presence of COVID-19 in our community is not yet leading us to declare a ‘public health emergency’ with restrictions on public gatherings and other limitations. For now, the best ways for preventing the spread of this new virus are the same as those for stopping the spread of the flu and other more common communicable diseases.”

Everyone can help reduce the spread of infectious diseases such as the flu and COVID-19 by doing the following:

- Washing hands often for 20-30 seconds with warm water and soap.
- Coughing or sneezing into your sleeve or a tissue, not into your bare hand.
- Staying home if sick.
- Keeping your immune system strong by eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep and regular exercise and by taking care of underlying health conditions.

There are also basic steps every household should take to prepare for any unexpected event, such as:

- Establishing a child care plan in the event your kids need to stay home from school.
- Making sure your household has the necessary food, drinks, medications and pet supplies if members of your household need to stay home and limit your contact with other people for a couple of weeks.
- Reach out to your neighbors, especially those who might need extra help, such as older adults or people living alone, to ensure they have access to medicines and other supplies.

Health officials also ask that the public stay informed and educated through trustworthy sources of information, such as the [CDC](#), [Oregon Health Authority](#) and [Washington County Public Health Division](#). General questions about COVID-19 can be answered by calling [2-1-1](#). Questions about your specific medical needs should be directed to your health care provider.

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