

TALBOT COUNTY UPDATE ON COVID-19 FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Talbot County has had no confirmed cases of COVID-19 but we have tested one person due to travel that was negative. Since this virus adversely affects individuals over 65 years of age due to chronic conditions and possibly a weakened immune system, Talbot Seniors are expressing concern about how they can protect themselves.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are the same as flu symptoms that include fever, cough, and other respiratory symptoms. Shortness of breath, regardless of whether influenza or COVID-19 is a reason to be seen by your private physician. Your physician can order a rapid influenza test and if still concerned about COVID-19 can order the appropriate test from a private laboratory. However, at this time we do not have transmission of COVID-19 within our community. The five confirmed cases in Maryland have all been due to travel and not local transmission of the virus.

The Maryland Department of Health laboratory is testing only those individuals with known exposure to confirmed cases of COVID-19 or high risk of exposure and symptoms. Local health departments are not collecting specimens for the test or doing the tests. Individuals must see their healthcare provider to determine if a test is indicated. Their provider can either contact the Talbot County Health Department about getting the test through the state laboratory or order the test through one of the two private labs doing the test.

If the provider requests the state laboratory do the test, an epidemiologist at the state level will have to assess the case and determine if there is a significant risk for the infection. The provider can call the local health department or a hotline number that they have been given to get this approval. If approval is given the local health department will then arrange for the specimen to be taken at the hospital and sent to the state lab. If testing is denied due to low possibility of infection with COVID-19, the person's primary care physician or specialist can still order the test through a private lab. Insurance companies have been notified by the Maryland Insurance Commissioner that this test is covered by all carriers and there is no co-pay with the test.

Individuals can take precautions to protect themselves from the flu and COVID-19: avoid sick people and crowds, wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, disinfect surface tops, door knobs and handrails, sneeze or cough into a tissue (immediately discarded) or your bent elbow, and avoid touching your face with your hands especially when you have been in public areas and you have not washed your hands or used the disinfectant gel on them.

Keep in mind that as of March 9, 2020, there had been 110,315 confirmed cases of COVID-19 within 107 countries and 3,841 deaths. In the USA we have confirmed 564 cases of COVID-19 and 22 deaths with 19 being in Washington, 2 in Florida, and 1 in California. By March 6, 2020 there had been, in the USA alone, 32 million cases of influenza and over 18,000 death.

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