MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19 Confirmed in CARPHA Member States

The first cases of COVID-19 in CARICOM have been confirmed in 3 CARPHA Member States. On 10th March 2020 Jamaica confirmed its first imported case of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), while St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Guyana announced on 11th March.

Earlier this month, CARPHA upgraded the risk level for the Caribbean to Very High following reports of the virus in non-CARICOM countries in close proximity to CARICOM CARPHA Member States.

CARPHA Executive Director Dr Joy St. John said “The health and safety of residents and visitors remain our top priority. We will continue to work with health authorities in our Member States to ensure that they are able to identify cases early and mount a rapid but coordinated public health response that includes identification and clinical management of cases, and effective public communication measures.”

COVID-19, a new strain of coronavirus is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus seems to be transmitted mainly via respiratory droplets that people sneeze, cough, or exhale. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

There is currently no vaccine and no specific antiviral treatment against the virus. Prevention is therefore critical to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.

Dr St. John urged the public to practice simple everyday actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. “We recommend that persons maintain basic hand and respiratory hygiene, and avoid close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.”

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. Simple everyday preventive actions can help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses:

- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands regularly, using soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, with your bent elbow or a tissue. Throw away used tissue immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and especially after touching contaminated surfaces or sick people.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early, and share previous travel history with relevant health care provider.

For more information about COVID-2019 visit http://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus

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