MEDIA RELEASE

CARPHA raises COVID-19 alert to Very High Following Reports of Imported Cases in the Caribbean

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. 5th March 2020. CARPHA has upgraded the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to the Caribbean Region to Very High. The revised risk level is based on international risk assessment guidelines, particularly in keeping with risk assessment for MERS-COV and pandemic influenza.

CARPHA Executive Director, Dr. Joy St. John stated “CARPHA's decision is also informed by reports of COVID-19 cases in non English-speaking Caribbean countries in close proximity to CARPHA Member States. Another factor is sustained transmission of the disease in countries with direct flights into the Caribbean region.”

Additionally, multiple countries outside the original epicentre of Wuhan City are reporting an increasing number of confirmed cases; while significantly more new cases are being reported from countries outside of China, than there are new cases in China.

These recent situations are clearly of concern and CARPHA Member States (CMS) are strongly urged to increase their surveillance mechanisms and to be ready to implement their national pandemic preparedness plans, which have been modified to address COVID-19.

Currently there is no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Neither is there a specific treatment.

Dr. St. John said “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.” She urges persons to pay attention to standard infection prevention and control precautions:

- 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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