



## Department of Health

**ANDREW M. CUOMO**  
Governor

**HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.**  
Commissioner

**SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.**  
Executive Deputy Commissioner

March 5, 2020

My Fellow New York Leaders:

I know you are concerned about novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the risk this poses to you, your family and your community.

As your State Health Commissioner and a longtime practicing physician, I want to assure you that the risk from this virus to New Yorkers remains low. You likely heard in the media, New York identified the first local cases of COVID-19 on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Despite this, the risk for contracting the virus is still low in New York State. People most at risk are those who have traveled internationally in the past 14 days or have been in close contact with an international traveler in the same time frame.

The State Health Department is working across the state, with counties, cities, towns, and more, to ensure plans are in place to minimize the spread of the virus. However, it is important to note that spread in the community is expected, but we can be successful by taking small steps to help contain it.

Cold and flu viruses are much more prevalent in New York right now. Your community members are far more likely to contract one of these viruses than COVID-19. You already know the steps to take to stop the spread of all of these viruses. Please remember to advise your residents to:

- Wash hands with soap and water, and often.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands, especially before eating
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- And stay home if they feel sick, or are caring for a sick housemate.

As I'm sure you've also heard, many people are asking what they can do to prepare if the virus becomes prevalent in our state.

One thing to do is to remind your residents to gather and update home preparedness kits. This kit would ideally contain a thermometer, decongestants, anti-inflammatory drugs and acetaminophen for fevers.

I also urge all of you to work with the State Health Department to ensure that all New Yorkers act on COVID-19 information only from reliable sources.

The Department of Health has fielded numerous calls from individuals inquiring about the use of face masks. CDC does not recommend the use of face masks or N95 respirators among the general public. We need to preserve the use of masks and other personal protective equipment for health care workers and individuals who may be ill.

Take the important steps included above and stay home when you feel ill, avoid contact people who are ill, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands, and wash your hands often with soap and water.

I know that medical disinformation and hateful, hurtful rumors are circulating on the internet. New Yorkers can access accurate, reliable and up-to-date information on the Department of Health's website: [www.health.ny.gov/coronavirus](http://www.health.ny.gov/coronavirus). New Yorkers can also call the Department of Health's hotline at 1-888-364-3065. I'd ask that you share this point of information on any of your government websites, social media sites and email lists. Your communities can also find reliable information and updates about the virus on the website and social media platforms of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19).

In New York State, we stick together when we face a challenge and work together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard Zucker M.D." in a cursive style.

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.  
Commissioner of Health