

Transcript: Twitter Town Hall with Berkeley Health Officer

March 6, 2020

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Welcome

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Welcome to our first Twitter town hall! We have City of Berkeley Health Officer Dr. Lisa Hernandez here with us to answer your questions about #coronavirus and #COVID19. If you have a question for Dr. Hernandez, tweet it to us with the hashtag #BerkCOVID19.

We're fortunate to have an experienced public health leader like Dr. Hernandez guiding our #COVID19 response. She's been with the City over 2 years and has a deep background in public health. She came to us from Santa Clara County, where she served as Deputy Health Officer.

Previously, she served as the Health Officer for Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. She holds a Masters in Public Health with a focus on epidemiology from UC Berkeley and an MD from the Georgetown School of Medicine.

Now, onto your questions! We've gotten a ton of great ones already. We won't be able to get through all of them today, but we are committed to addressing all your concerns. For whatever we can't get to, we'll post responses on our website next week at

<http://cityofberkeley.info/coronavirus>.

This is the first time we're doing this, so we appreciate your patience through any technical challenges. 😊

Q1: Notification of potential exposure

"I still think the public should know about potential exposure. In such a densely populated place, it's impossible to notify all individuals of exposure if they left their home at all."

[Link to thread](#)

I've gotten a lot of questions on this theme: why do we consider the risk low right now, and why aren't we providing more details about where the Berkeley coronavirus patient may have been?

The presence of this case doesn't increase risk because it was acquired outside the United States and we have not seen evidence of confirmed community spread in Berkeley.

What you should do now is to prepare. We are seeing community spread elsewhere in the California. We know it will come here eventually and when that happens we will change our guidance to reflect the current risk level.

Right now, we're asking people to focus on two things. 1. Help slow the spread by practicing everyday healthy behaviors: wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.

Make a plan now for what you will need to do when community spread does reach Berkeley. We sent out a message yesterday about what you should be thinking about, with links to resources from @CDCgov to help you prepare:

https://cityofberkeley.info/City_Manager/Press_Releases/2020/2020-03-05_Prepare_your_household_for_increased_COVID-19_spread.aspx

King County Washington is experiencing an outbreak right now. The advice they've shared with their community this week is a preview of how our recommendations would change if that happened here: <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/news/2020/March/4-covid-recommendations.aspx>

Q2: How do we trace infected individual's contacts?

"News reports said the infected Berkeleyan stayed "mostly at home" after returning from Italy. What is being done to trace and inform that person's contacts when they were not at home? #BerkCOVID19"

[Link to thread](#)

Great question. When we learn of the presence of a communicable disease that could pose a threat to our community, we conduct a comprehensive assessment of exposure risk.
#BerkCOVID19

We first make sure that the patient is isolated to stop disease spread. Then we interview the patient: where they've gone and when, how long they spent there, who were they in contact with, what stage of the disease they were in at each point.

We then track down anyone who we determine is at risk of exposure. If the case was in a public place at a time they were contagious and we can't identify the individuals who were present through our regular process, we would do a community notification.

We had to do this last year when we confirmed a person with measles had been in a public place when they were contagious:

https://cityofberkeley.info/City_Manager/Press_Releases/2019/2019-05-17_Measles_case_confirmed_in_Berkeley.aspx

If CDC considers that people were exposed on the plane, they would be notified by their local public health agency.

I've gotten lots of questions about the patient's personal information. We never release personal info that could identify an individual or doesn't support actions recommended by Public Health. If a community member is at risk, we would notify them.

Q3: School closures

"I'm very concerned that Santa Clara county schools remain open despite 7 independent community cases which suggest significant spread is occurring there. Why are officials taking this decision? How will Berkeley make decisions about closures and cancellations?"

#BerkCOVID19"

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We are not recommending Berkeley school closures now, but this is one option in our approach to reduce the spread. Recommendations would be based on severity of an outbreak, and current risk of transmission at schools. #BerkCOVID19

We'd make that decision case by case based on the presence of the disease in the community and the school.

Right now – and remember, this situation is developing and scientists are learning more about COVID daily, so recommendations could change. But as of today, we may recommend closing a school only if there is a confirmed case associated with that school.

There are other strategies we may put in place before recommending school closures, including canceling large school functions and encouraging tele-schooling. Our recommendations will always be based on what is prudent for the level of risk at that time.

These are the current @CDCgov recommendations for schools:

K-12: <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

Colleges and universities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities.html>

Q4: Masks

"@cityofberkeley #berkCOVID19 Has the City of Berkeley advised its citizens to wear masks when deemed necessary?"

[Link to thread](#)

We and @CDCgov do not currently recommend face masks for people who are not sick. Please keep masks available for those who need them.

Masks should be used by people who are already sick, to keep them from spreading the disease to others. Medical providers need masks because they are in direct, close contact with infected individuals.

Q5: Where to get tested

"@CityofBerkeley which hospitals/clinics in the Bay Area have test kits right now? #BerkCOVID19"

[Link to thread](#)

Public health labs are the only ones testing now. Hospitals and clinics are working with us and other public health agencies around the country. In the future, the federal government has said testing will also be performed at private labs. #BerkCOVID19

If you're sick and concerned about having been infected, contact your health care provider. Call before visiting so they can take precautions to protect their staff and other patients. Please do not go straight to an emergency room if you think you may have #COVID19.

Q6: Precautions for sick family members

"#BerkCOVID19 do you need to do anything special other than regular cold and flu precautions to take care of a family member? Thanks!"

[Link to thread](#)

If you or a family member is confirmed through testing to have COVID19, these are the CDC recommendations to prevent spread within your home: <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html> Cleaning and disinfection: <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Q7: State of Emergency

"@CityofBerkeley London Breed recently declared a state of emergency for San Francisco and Gaving Nelson for the state of CA. Does that serve any purpose or just increase fears? #BerkCOVID19"

[Link to thread](#)

The @CityofBerkeley City Manager Dee Williams-Ridley also declared a local emergency on Tuesday March 3. This declaration allows us to marshal more resources and better prepare for more cases, which is something we expect.

Q8: Precautions around food delivery

"#berkCOVID19 lots of seniors who are staying at home may be using delivery services for food and household items. Is there anything special to do to the items you received?"

[Link to thread](#)

It's great that seniors are thinking about protecting themselves. Wash your hands before you eat or touch your face. No special precautions about food delivery. #berkCOVID19

Q9: Stocking up on supplies

Question: “@CityofBerkeley Are there certain supplies Berkeley residents should have on hand in case greater numbers are self-quarantined? #BerkCOVID19”

[Link to thread](#)

If you are at higher risk -- such as those with heart disease, auto-immune diseases, diabetes and more -- there are some recommendations to prepare: <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

For the general population, here are CDC recommendations for preparing your household: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

Q10: Travel

[Link to thread](#)

We've gotten a lot of questions about travel. Here's the @CDCgov general guidance on the topic: <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html> #berkCOVID19

People have asked if they should cancel travel plans. See this @CDCgov FAQ to help make these decisions: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/faqs.html>

For those returning home from high risk countries, please check this @CDCgov guidance. You should know that the global and domestic situation is changing rapidly, so please check for updates before and after you've traveled: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>

Thank you

[Link](#)

Thank you so much! It's a pleasure to serve our community. Protecting the public health means that all of us can take actions to make our community more prepared and healthy. Signing off! -
Dr. Lisa Hernandez, City of Berkeley Health Officer

Closing

[Link to thread](#)

Thank you to everyone who submitted questions, on Twitter and via the web! For questions we weren't able to get to today, we will post responses on our website next week and share the link here. #BerkCOVID19

In the meantime, find more information at <http://cityofberkeley.info/coronavirus>, including:

- ✓ how to protect yourself
- ✓ symptoms to look for
- ✓ what to do if you suspect you're sick
- ✓ links to resources from state and federal health agencies
- ✓ all #COVID19 related news from the City