

CDC Newsroom

CDC, Washington State Report First COVID-19 Death

Media Statement

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There also are ongoing investigations into possible outbreaks in health care settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health officials in the state of Washington have reported three hospitalized patients who have tested presumptive-positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, including one patient who died.

- Two of the patients are from a long-term care facility (LTCF) where one is a health care worker. Additional residents and staff of the LTCF who have not yet been tested for COVID-19 are reportedly either ill with respiratory symptoms or hospitalized with pneumonia of unknown cause.
- The patient who died, a male in his 50s, was being treated at the same hospital. He was not a resident of the LTCF. CDC erroneously identified the patient as female in a briefing earlier today with the President and Vice President.

While there is an ongoing investigation, the source of these infections is currently unknown. Circumstances suggest person-to-person spread in the community, including in the LTCF.

CDC spokesperson Dr. Nancy Messonnier said, “Our hearts go out to the family of the patient who died as well as to the families of the people who are caught up in this outbreak. The health of the residents, staff and community of this skilled nursing facility are a top priority. We will work with Public Health – Seattle and King County to support the care of the patients, the safety of the health care workers, and the well-being of the people in the surrounding community.”

This is the first reported death in the United States from COVID-19, as well as the first reported case in a health care worker and the first possible outbreak in a LTCF. These reports from Washington follow others of community spread in Oregon and two places in California earlier this week. While there is still much to learn about the unfolding situations in California, Oregon and Washington, preliminary information raises the level of concern about the immediate threat for COVID-19 for certain communities in the United States. Most people in the United States will have little immediate risk of exposure to this virus, but some people will be at increased risk depending on their exposures. The greatest risk is to those who have been in close contact with people with COVID-19. People with suspected or confirmed exposure should reach out to their state or local public health department.

CDC is sending a team of experts to support the investigation in Washington. Dr. Messonnier said, “We recognize that this is a difficult time; we are facing a historic public health challenge. We will continue to respond to COVID-19 in an aggressive way to contain and blunt the threat of this virus. While we still hope for the best, we continue to prepare for this virus to become widespread in the United States.”

These three cases bring the total number of COVID-19 cases detected through the U.S. public health system to 22. The federal government will continue to respond aggressively to this rapidly evolving situation.

Testing for the virus that causes COVID-19 was conducted in Washington state using the CDC rRT-PCR. Results will be confirmed at CDC, but a presumptive positive result using the CDC test is treated as a positive for public health response purposes and a coordinated public health response has begun.

For more information about COVID-19 visit www.cdc.gov/covid19.

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