



F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner 	Health Department AGENCY REPORT	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject	20-0194R – Informational Hearing – Baltimore’s Strategic Response to the Wuhan Coronavirus		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

March 2, 2020

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review 20-0194R – Informational Hearing – Baltimore’s Strategic Response to the Wuhan Coronavirus. The purpose of this legislation is to invite various City agencies to testify on Baltimore’s strategic response to the Wuhan coronavirus.

Since Jan. 17, BCHD has been closely monitoring the outbreak of severe respiratory illnesses caused by the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in China and other areas of the world when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) informed local and state public health officials of the public health concern. On Jan. 30, the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern.”¹ The following day, Jan. 31, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II declared a public health emergency (PHE) for the US, and on the same day, the President of the US signed a presidential “Proclamation on suspension of entry as immigrants and nonimmigrants of persons who pose a risk of transmitting 2019 novel coronavirus.”²

At this time, the risk of illness caused by the COVID-19 to the general public in Baltimore City and in Maryland is low. Since the public health emergency declaration, the US federal government has taken steps to limit the importation of COVID-19 into the US by instituting travel restrictions: the CDC recommends avoiding non-essential travel to mainland China, the US State Department of Health instituted a Level 4 travel advisory to not travel to mainland China, and US commercial airlines have limited/stopped flights to China.

Furthermore, since Feb. 4, any US-bound travelers with a travel history from mainland China are being funneled to 11 US airports to be screened by CDC officials for the risk of COVID-19. Travelers presenting with fever, cough, or trouble breathing will be taken to a medical facility for further evaluation and care. Travelers who do not have symptoms will be

¹ 30 January 2020, World Health Organization, Statement on the second meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), link <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-%282005%29-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-%282019-ncov%29>

² 31 January 2020, White House Proclamation, “Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Persons who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus.” Link <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspension-entry-immigrants-nonimmigrants-persons-pose-risk-transmitting-2019-novel-coronavirus/>

allowed to reach their final destination. They will be asked to monitor for symptoms for 14 days from the time they left China and asked to stay home and limit interactions with others as much as possible.

BCHD has been preparing for COVID-19 cases in the City and state through planning and coordination with numerous partners. Since Jan. 17, BCHD has been participating in information sharing conference calls with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), the CDC, and other "Big City" Health Departments across the country. BCHD staff are also monitoring the CDC COVID-19 website daily for guidance updates. BCHD activated its Incident Command Structure on Jan. 31 for COVID-19, to coordinate our response and prepare for the possibility of cases in Baltimore City.

Response objectives currently are focused on quickly identifying Persons Under Investigations (PUIs), maintaining situational awareness, coordinating with partners, and reviewing our pandemic and emerging infectious disease response plans. BCHD has also been confirming our inventory of personal protective equipment and expanding the number of staff we have that are N-95 respirator fit-tested. BCHD Druid and Eastern Health District Clinics are currently screening for PUI's as recommended by MDH and CDC guidance.

Since February 4, 2020 the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has taken the lead in conducting risk assessments and monitoring of Maryland travelers returning from mainland China. MDH follows-up with the traveler regularly for 14 days to monitor for the development of fever, cough and/or trouble breathing. The BCHD is readying our monitoring system if MDH requests that local jurisdictions assist with traveler monitoring.

BCHD has also bolstered our after-hours systems that are in place for healthcare providers to reach BCHD to report PUI's or have consultations. Protocols were updated in light of COVID-19 to prepare our Duty Officers to respond timely and accurately to COVID-19 inquiries. This process was recently tested by MDH during an unannounced, after-hours drill.

As part of our preparations, BCHD has conducted multiple communications with community partners and the public including the development of a BCHD COVID-19 website and a COVID-19 press conference with the Health Commissioner. MDH and CDC guidance was shared by BCHD with schools and healthcare providers. Specific outreach was done to City Urgent Care Centers and Minute Clinics. BCHD has presented COVID-19 information to School Health nurses and answered questions from multiple stakeholders including universities, public and private schools, recent travelers, healthcare providers, cruise lines, and individual residents.

BCHD has undertaken planning for COVID-19 with other city agencies. In early February, BCHD worked in coordination with the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, and the City 911 Center to develop a COVID-19 911 protocol. BCHD also provided a briefing on COVID-19 and BCHD response actions at the Feb. 10 multiagency Baltimore City Homeland Security Preparedness Committee meeting.

As preparations continue, BCHD will be updating our Infectious Disease Response and Pandemic Plans. BCHD will also plan to review Human Resources policies that may be needed in

the event of a pandemic to ensure we are aligned with federal guidance. And BCHD will continue to provide timely and accurate information on COVID-19 to our partners and the public.

BCHD supports this resolution, and will be present at the hearing to answer any questions on this matter.