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BULLETIN:

FIRST U.S. CASE OF CHINESE CORONAVIRUS

January 21, 2020
by Lynne Peterson

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported the first case of the new Chinese coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in the U.S. – a U.S. resident who had traveled to Wuhan, China. In a teleconference with reporters, CDC officials and Washington State public health officials said the man arrived in the U.S. on January 15, prior to when the airport screenings started on January 17.

The man, who is in his early 30s, is currently in isolation at Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett, Washington, and he was described as “in good condition,” “not clinically ill,” and “is right now very healthy...getting supportive care and monitoring.” He was hospitalized “out of an abundance of caution...not because of severe illness.”

The man claims not to have visited any of the implicated markets in Wuhan and did not know anyone who was ill. He was asymptomatic when he arrived in the U.S. and proactively called his doctor on Sunday, January 19, 2020, when he first developed symptoms. Officials did not say what those symptoms were.

The CDC was contacted about the man, and a specimen was sent to the CDC for RT-PCR analysis, which confirmed the coronavirus. Nancy Messonnier, MD, director of the CDC’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said, “We believe the risk to the public is low.” Washington State and CDC officials are in the process of tracking the man’s contacts and movements.

Snohomish County health officer Chris Spitters, MD, said, “No one wants to be first...but these are the types of situations that public health officials and their partners train and prepare for. Everything is going along quite smoothly.”

The CDC is expanding airport screenings beyond JFK, Los Angeles (LAX), and San Francisco (SFO) to include Atlanta (ATL) and Chicago O’Hare (ORD) later this week. So far, more than 1,200 passengers were screened at JFK, LAX, and SFO, but no coronavirus patients were detected. There are no plans for active screening at the Seattle airport (SEA). Instead, the CDC is working with the airlines to have all passengers traveling from Wuhan, China, rerouted and re-ticketed to pass through one of the 5 U.S. airports with active screening. And the CDC raised the travel health notice from Level 1 to Level 2.

Interestingly, officials more than once in the teleconference tried to distance the response to this virus to the handling of the first U.S. Ebola patient in Dallas a few years ago.

Asked how the virus is transmitted, Dr. Messonnier said, “We hope over the next coming days the situation will become clearer. The key issue we need to understand is how easily and sustainably the virus is spread person-to-person, and that is not something we have done yet, but we are working with our partners to better understand that.”

Trends-in-Medicine ■ 2731 N.E. Pinecrest Lakes Blvd ■ Jensen Beach FL 34957
772-285-0801 ■ Fax 772-334-0856 ■ www.trends-in-medicine.com

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Asked about the outlook for a vaccine, Dr. Messonnier said, “The National Institutes of Health has always been very active in this area, and there is early work and conversations...but development of a vaccine is complex. It isn’t something that will be available tomorrow.”

What else do we know about the coronavirus from these and other sources:

- The virus is now spreading person-to-person.
 - South Korea’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) reported its first confirmed case of the new coronavirus – a patient who flew from Wuhan, China, to Incheon airport. There have also been 2 cases in Thailand, one in Japan, and one in Taiwan.
 - Confirmed cases in China now total 298, with six deaths, ~20% of live patients are in severe or critical condition, and ~10% have been cured and discharged from the hospital. At least 15 medical personnel in Wuhan, China, have contracted the coronavirus.
 - Chinese authorities said the coronavirus has now spread across the country, with cases in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Beijing, and other cities.
 - Hong Kong is using infrared temperature screening at its entry ports/airports.
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