

COVID-19, the novel coronavirus that's spreading from China throughout the world: You've heard about it; you're concerned about it. Here are some things you need to know.

1. We're on it.

Your Board of Health is the local end of a chain that starts with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and goes through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO) down to us. At every link in this chain emergency response plans are being reviewed and supplies and equipment are being marshaled.

In this rapidly evolving situation, an important part of our job is to keep you informed of the risks and the proper precautions you can take. You can also get updates, and more information on the virus itself, on these websites:

[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html)

[mass.gov/guides/information-on-the-outbreak-of-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19](https://www.mass.gov/guides/information-on-the-outbreak-of-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19)

2. Understand the risk.

As of this writing, in late February 2020, the risk of infection in our area is low. But we're not counting on its staying low. It's possible that we'll see cases of COVID-19 in our community. We're lucky; we have time to get ready.

3. Things *you* can do to prepare.

There are basic precautions that everyone can easily take to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 — or flu. Let's face it, the world is a germey place, and you pick up those germs on your hands and carry them into your body by touching your eyes, nose, mouth, or food.

- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer. Use those sanitary wipes at the door of the supermarket to clean the shopping cart handle; use a paper towel to open the door of the restroom door when you leave.
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- Be considerate of others! Cover your cough or sneeze, ideally with a tissue, and throw away the tissue. Then wash your hands. If you really have to use your sleeve instead of a tissue, don't then put your hands on your wet sleeve.

- Start thinking about being prepared for *any* kind of emergency, from an infectious disease outbreak to an ice storm. You can get started by visiting www.ready.gov.

If you have questions, contact the Board of Health at 413 772 1404 ex 2013