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> Church leaders urge education, caution and common sense as U.S. coronavirus cases increase

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February 28, 2020

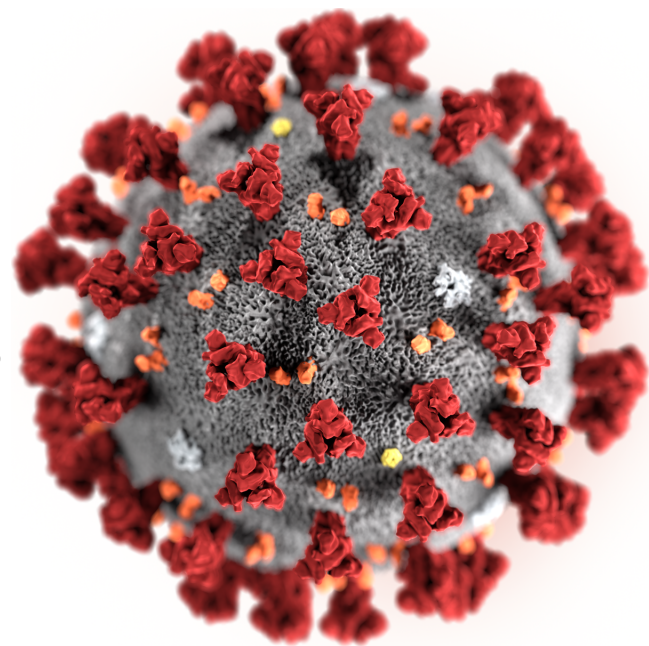
Written by **Connie Larkman**

As new cases of the coronavirus are reported in other countries and across the United States, United Church of Christ leaders are urging education, caution and common sense — sharing a few basic guidelines to enable congregations and other UCC organizations to find useful, relevant information to plan their course of action.

Coronavirus (CoVid-19) is a respiratory illness that causes flu-like symptoms. As of Feb. 27, there were 60 reported cases

(https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/02/26/how-to-prepare-for-coronavirus/?arc404=true) of coronavirus in the U.S. Doctors at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said that while they expect to see the number of cases increase as the disease spreads, they stress that the immediate risk of the disease remains low.

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to pneumonia, causing breathing difficulties, including shortness of breath. Most people who get it will contract a mild to moderate illness, a bit like flu. Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer or chronic lung disease. Presently the death rate is low, around 2 percent, which is a little above the death rate for flu. More information is available in this video, "5 Things to Know About COVID-19," (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OKr53uXhS4&feature=youtu.be>) from the CDC.



"Understandably, there are many questions circulating regarding appropriate precautionary measures around the coronavirus as news of this health threat continues to unfold," said the Rev. Traci Blackmon, UCC associate general minister, noting that the basic information shared below should not be construed as medical advice, but as best practices and basic precautions. "Because this is a rapidly changing situation, it will be crucial to keep checking the latest guidance and information from the CDC." (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>)"

Some of these everyday precautions, focused on good hygiene measures, are common sense — helpful to keep in mind anytime and especially during colds and flu season. It's also important to note that this information, gathered from a number of sources, is far from complete. Continue to check the reliable sources noted below — the CDC, the World Health Organization — to keep abreast of situation in the U.S. If transmission of the coronavirus changes significantly, changes in hygiene protocols may be suggested to optimize protection.

Here are a number of precautionary measures the UCC Human Resources Department shared with staff in the national offices.

- **Stay home if you are feeling sick.**
- **Wash your hands frequently.**
- **Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.**
- **Disinfect surfaces used regularly.**
- **Use hand sanitizer.**
- **Avoid close contact with someone who is sick.**
- **Practice these precautionary measures at home and pass this information along to family and friends.**

If you have traveled internationally during the last 14 days, feel sick with fever or cough, or have difficulty breathing the CDC has several recommendations:

- **Seek medical advice. Call ahead before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room.**
- **Tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.**
- **Avoid contact with others.**
- **Do not travel while sick.**
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing.**
- **Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol immediately after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.**

UCC Disaster Ministries has developed a **web section** ([https://www.ucc.org/disaster\\_coronavirus\\_resources\\_from\\_the\\_ucc](https://www.ucc.org/disaster_coronavirus_resources_from_the_ucc)) for congregations that includes a word from Blackmon, a bulletin insert ([https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/pages/13238/attachments/original/1582923550/Coronavirus\\_and\\_the\\_Church\\_Bulletin.pdf?1582923550](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/pages/13238/attachments/original/1582923550/Coronavirus_and_the_Church_Bulletin.pdf?1582923550)) and an excellent resource from the Southern New England Conference UCC, with a checklist and advice for community engagement, worship (e.g. communion, offering, passing the peace), communications, leadership backup, pastoral care and even fiscal concerns.

"I believe that, as the faith community, we have a special responsibility to care for our fellow congregants and communities," Blackmon writes. "When we are prepared, we are in a better position to help others. Our demonstration of love of neighbor also requires us to counter scapegoating and prejudice such as already has been shown to some Chinese and Chinese-Americans. They are not to blame for the coronavirus!"

CoVid-19, first detected in China in December, has now been documented in patients in Iran, Italy, South Korea, France, Germany and Japan. According to the Washington Post, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Nigeria have just reported their first cases, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/28/coronavirus-live-updates/>) all which have links to Italy, WHO officials said.

"Our greatest enemy right now is not the virus itself. It's fear, rumors and stigma," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a daily briefing on Feb. 28. (<https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1233411869110460416>) "Most cases can still be traced to known contacts or clusters of cases. We do not see evidence as yet that the virus is spreading freely in communities. As long as that's the case, we still have a chance at containing this virus."

Tedros said that more than 20 vaccines are in development globally, and several anti-viral drugs are in clinical trials. Health officials expect the first

Bookmark these resources for developing information:

- CDC COVID-19 updates (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>).
- CDC New travel alerts (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>).
- World Health Organization updates. (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>)
- WHO Preparedness resources. (<https://www.who.int/influenza/preparedness/pandemic/en/>)
- Coronavirus resources from the UCC. ([https://www.ucc.org/disaster\\_coronavirus\\_resources\\_from\\_the\\_ucc](https://www.ucc.org/disaster_coronavirus_resources_from_the_ucc))
- Ohio Department of Health information. (<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/novel-coronavirus/resources/novel-coronavirus-fact-sheet>)
- FEMA, general disaster guidance for Houses of Worship. (<https://www.fema.gov/faith-resources>)

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