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Released: March 17, 2020

Delaware County's March 17 Update to Brief Residents on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Today the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced 20 additional positive cases of COVID-19 in the state. There are two new cases in Delaware County, bringing the total number of cases in the county to nine. The total number of cases in the state is 96.

Unlike neighboring counties, Delaware County does not have a County Health Department. Delaware County is dependent on the Pennsylvania Department of Health to test, investigate, quarantine and monitor residents in Delaware County who have, or may have COVID-19. The County is also dependent on the State to receive information and updates. Currently, the County is not given the municipality of where a patient lives, information on the contact tracing or how many people have been quarantined as a result. Having more information would allow the County to make more informed decisions and give better guidance to our residents.

Delaware County residents also must call the state number- 1-877-PA-HEALTH for information and guidance rather than a local office.

"While we understand the Pennsylvania Department of Health is working around the clock and assisting the entire state, we as a County need to do more for our residents," said Delaware County Council Chairman Brian Zidek. "Council has been working to brainstorm ways we can achieve this immediately as we deal with this public health crisis."

On March 13, Chester County offered to assist Delaware County, by allowing Chester County's Department of Health to serve as Delaware County's Department of Health.

On March 14, Delaware County Council and the Chester County Board of Commissioners sent a letter to Governor Wolf requesting that the Chester County Health Department be authorized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and its Department of Health to assume primary responsibility and work with Delaware County's elected officials and staff, regarding all aspects of Delaware County's public health response to the Coronavirus outbreak in an effort to better serve the community of Delaware County.

Local elected leaders, both Republican and Democrat, in the County also sent Governor Wolf letters supporting Council's request.

"We believe this will allow us to respond to the COVID-19 emergency more effectively," said Zidek.

Chairman Zidek spoke with Chester County Commissioner Marian Moskowitz and the Pennsylvania Department of Health to obtain the State's blessing on the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement proposed by Chester County and Delaware County. The Pennsylvania Department of Health expressed concerns that Chester County may not have the resources to meet both county's needs pertaining to COVID-19. Chester County assured the state that they have conducted an analysis of their capacity, and they are confident that are able to serve both counties.

The Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement is pending approval from the Governor. If the request is approved by the Governor, Chester County, acting through its County Health Department will provide public health services relating to COVID-19 for Delaware County.

Those responsibilities include:

- COVID-19 expanded testing
- COVID-19 case investigation and surveillance
- COVID-19 quarantine designations
- COVID-19 public health communication
- Daily monitoring of Emergency Room volume in hospitals in Delaware County
- A Public Call Center

Additional updates from the State:

This past weekend, Governor Wolf advised that non-essential retail facilities in Delaware County should close for 14 days. He has expanded this recommendation state-wide. All non-essential retail facilities in Pennsylvania should close. The Governor gave examples of non-essential businesses. These include movie theatres, bars, gyms, hair salons, nail salons, spas, casinos, concerts, golf courses and retail facilities, including shopping malls- except for pharmacy or other health care facilities within retail operations.

The Governor has ordered that all restaurants and bars close their dine-in facilities. Businesses that offer carry-out, delivery, and drive-through food and beverage service may continue to operate, but eating and drinking inside restaurants and bars is temporarily prohibited. These businesses offering carry-out, delivery, and drive-through food and beverage should employ social distancing best practices and be aware of the Trump Administration's guidance to avoid gatherings of 10 or more people.

Social distancing is essential as more Pennsylvanians are testing positive for COVID-19. By taking these steps now, we can protect public health and slow the spread of this virus.

Businesses that do not adhere to this order could face enforcement actions.

Essential retail facilities such as food stores, pharmacies and gas stations and their suppliers will remain open. The goal is to prevent of the spread of the virus. Limiting unnecessary social outings like going to the movies, a bar, the gym, clothes shopping, etc. is how we can accomplish this.

“We understand that shutting down for two weeks may hurt local business owners,” said Zidek. “Council is working with Delaware County’s Commerce Director and other organizations and departments to request federal relief funding for businesses. We are working on ways we can lessen the financial burden for our small businesses and will be sharing that information soon.”

This afternoon Chairman Zidek participated in a Phone Town Hall hosted by the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce. The call was held for members of the local business community and addressed the impact that COVID-19 is having on them.

The Delaware County Commerce Center is asking business owners to complete a short online survey on how COVID-19 is affecting their businesses. Working with their regional southeast PA economic development partners, the Commerce Center is using the data collected through this survey to help address the needs of our greater business community.

Business owners can take the survey here: <https://arcg.is/1ryu5>

Additional Updates from the County:

Delaware County has been working to offer residents testing sites for COVID-19, including drive- thru testing locations. Information on testing sites will be released shortly.

The Delaware County Government Center will be closed to the public on March 18, 19 and 20. Government Center offices will operate with a reduced and staggered staff to ensure the continuity of government, however, the offices will not be open to the public. Residents can call government offices on March 18, 19 and 20, but are not able to access the building.

Delaware County Council will hold their Public Council Meeting on Wednesday, March 18 at 6:00p.m. as planned. However, in order to adhere to CDC recommendations of avoiding large gatherings and observing social distancing, the public will not be permitted into the meetings.

The March 18 meeting will be streamed live on Council's Facebook Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/DelawareCountyCouncil/>

Residents can email their public comment. Public comments must be submitted with the same information that is requested at a public meeting including the person's name and address. Emails can be sent immediately to:
PublicComment@co.delaware.pa.us

Public comment will be accepted until the meeting is adjourned. The public comments will be read into record during the meeting and Council will respond if warranted. If you do not have access to email you can call in your public comment: 610-891-4931. Please give or leave your name, address and public comment. Your comment will be transcribed and read into record. Emailed or phoned-in comments deemed inappropriate will not be read into public record.

The Delaware County Court of Common Pleas has made modifications to judicial operations for March 18, 19 and 20. In coordination with the District Attorney's office and the Public Defender's office, the Courts will be holding video criminal hearings on March 18 and 20. No members of the public or family members will be permitted into the hearing in observance with social distancing protocol.

On March 19, four judges will be sitting for Protection from Abuse (PFA) cases. Parties will be allowed witnesses, however friends, family members and the public will not be permitted. District Courts will be closed to the public on March 18, 19 and 20. Magisterial District Judges will be on call after hours to receive temporary PFA applications and conduct criminal preliminary arraignments. Bail and any other monies owed to the courts may be paid online.

More details about next week's operations of the Delaware County Government Center, the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas and Magisterial District Courts will be released in the following days.

On March 13, the GEO Group, who runs the George W. Hill Correctional Facility received confirmation that an employee of the prison had tested positive for COVID-19. They followed guidance from the CDC and advised 23 prison employees who had been in contact with the individual who tested positive to self-quarantine at home. They placed 11 inmates who had been in contact with the infected employee in quarantine in a separate unit of the prison. GEO continues to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The 23 employees and 11 inmates were tested. Of those 34 people tested- one additional employee of the prison has tested positive. Out of an abundance of caution, GEO's medical team will continue to monitor those individuals in their current housing status isolated from the rest of the inmate population until March 20.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health has medically cleared and released for duty nineteen employees from self-quarantine. The Prison currently has eight employees who remain on self-quarantine, with six tentatively scheduled for medical clearance by the Pennsylvania Department of Health on March 26. In total, two maintenance employees have tested positive (including the employee who first tested positive on March 13) and will remain on quarantine until they have two negative tests 24 hours apart.

In order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19- all Delaware County Parks and Recreation Facilities operated by the County have cancelled their programming. Buildings and structures located at Delaware County operated parks are also closed. Residents ARE free to enjoy the parks and trails, but all programming, buildings and structures are closed. We remind residents to practice social distancing while at the parks.

Another reminder--

Right now the best way to protect yourself is to take the same precautions you would to prevent the flu or common cold:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze with your elbow to avoid touching your face
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm/hot water for at least 20 seconds
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Clean surfaces frequently, including countertops, light switches, cell phones, remotes, and other frequently touched items
- If you are feeling sick, stay home. Rest, take care of yourself and don't spread the germs.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you are asked to call the State Health Department at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

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If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you are asked to call the State Health Department at 1-877-PA-HEALTH or 911.

The County has created a website dedicated to information on the Coronavirus, including prevention, resources and a FAQ section with link to the PA Health Department and CDC.

The website is:

www.delcopa.gov/ich/resources/coronavirus.html

Residents are encouraged to register for the DelcoAlert notification system which alerts residents of updates and emergencies. You can register here: www.delcopa.gov/delcoalert/delcoalert.html