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MEDIA RELEASE

2019-nCoV: CARPHA urges the Region to be Vigilant, Be Prepared

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, January 27, 2020. CARPHA has activated its incident management team and is coordinating the Regional Health response to the 2019 novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), outbreak in light of the increased number of confirmed cases of infections in China and internationally.

“CARPHA is monitoring the international situation as it evolves. We continue to work closely with Caribbean Member States (CMS), and Caribbean coordinating partners and mechanisms to respond to the threat and to prepare CMS to prevent further transmission from exported case if they were to happen in countries,” states Dr. Joy St John, CARPHA Executive Director.

There is still much more to learn about how the 2019-nCoV virus spreads, severity of associated illness, and other features of the virus. We do know that the 2019-nCoV virus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. It is part of a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

According to WHO, as of January 26, there were 2794 confirmed cases of patients with pneumonia caused by the new strain of coronavirus. Outside of China, at least eleven (11) more countries have confirmed at least one case among travellers who visited Wuhan. Reports on January 25 indicated there is now one secondary case in a family member of a case in Vietnam. On 21 January, the US CDC announced the first case in the USA. Cases have now been reported in Canada, France, and Australia.

“CARPHA is recommending that Member States be proactive and vigilant. They must reinforce surveillance measures at points of entry, communication strategies which emphasize good hand hygiene, and measures targeted at reducing the importation of this new virus to our shores,” stated Dr. St John.

Currently, there are no restrictions on international travel and no special precautions travellers need to take when travelling to the Caribbean since there have been no reported cases of 2019-nCoV in the Caribbean. Travellers are thus advised to:

- Stay informed about the 2019-nCoV situation in any countries to which they are travelling.
- Practice general infection control measures, such as frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

CARPHA remains committed to supporting its Member States in adapting existing influenza preparedness plans for 2019-nCoV, refreshing training of health care workers in universal precautions and the use of necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), and implementing measures to protect the most vulnerable in our populations from developing the disease.

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