

Answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19

Questions about what officials are doing

Q: What is Victoria doing to prevent the arrival or spread of COVID-19?

A: The Victoria County Public Health Department is monitoring the situation in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management, the City of Victoria, first responders and health care and education officials to determine best practices to protect people from catching or spreading the virus. The health department gets regular updates from the CDC and other sources, so these decisions are based on the latest available information.

Q: What does the new case in Yoakum mean for Victoria?

A: Victoria's response to cases outside the city and county depends on a variety of factors, and not all of those factors are apparent right away. The health department will continue to work with its local partners (Office of Emergency Management, first responders, health care officials) to determine whether the new case presents an elevated risk for Victoria County and whether the plans that are already in place need to be updated based on that. As of Friday, March 13, the following protocols were put into place in Victoria: A COVID-19 hotline was established to answer residents' questions, local hospitals modified visitor policies, and county jail and juvenile facilities began intake monitoring and screening and are following precautionary measures recommended by local health authorities.

Q: Has anyone in Victoria gotten sick?

A: So far, there have been no confirmed cases in Victoria County. If that changes, the health department will make sure that information is communicated through all available channels.

Q: Have there been any suspected cases in Victoria? Will information be released on suspected cases?

A: The health department isn't able to release information about suspected cases because of HIPPA patient privacy concerns and because Department of State Health Services recommendations, but if a person is suspected of having the virus, health care workers and first responders have procedures in place to prevent themselves and others from being exposed while they work to determine if it's a legitimate case. So far, there have been no confirmed cases in Victoria County.

Q: What information can be released at what times about patients?

A: If there is a confirmed case, the health department will release some basic details such as the person's age, how they were exposed to the virus and what steps are being taken to contain the infection. The health department will not release any identifying information about the person.

Q: Will any public events in Victoria be canceled?

A: Based on guidance from the CDC, the City of Victoria and Victoria County will take steps to cancel City- and County-sponsored public events that would attract gatherings that would exceed guidelines established by the CDC. As of Monday, March 16, the CDC and the White House recommend canceling gatherings of more than 10 people. Private organizers are strongly encouraged to follow this guidance as well for their own events. For updates about specific private events, you should refer to the organizer's website or social media.

Q: How will this impact local EMTs and first responders?

A: Our first responders, which include EMTs and dispatchers, are continually updating their procedures based on discussions with the health department and the Office of Emergency Management so that they can respond effectively to suspected COVID-19 cases and limit exposure for themselves and others. That includes asking questions about travel history to determine whether someone might have been exposed, and it also includes wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks and making sure that, if they have to bring someone to a hospital who has COVID-19-like symptoms, the hospital is aware of that so they can prepare. These are measures that will not only protect our first responders but will keep the virus from spreading if someone does have it.

Q: I heard that there's an infected person at Citizens/DeTar and they're not telling us...

A: If there is a confirmed case in Victoria, the health department will report it immediately in order to protect public health. That information will be posted on their Facebook page and their website and sent as a press release to local media outlets, and it will also be shared through the city and county social media accounts and www.victoriatoem.org

Q: Does Victoria County have the ability to test for COVID-19?

A: The public health department is available to assist health care professionals in the collection of samples from patients suspected of having COVID-19, and the samples will be sent to a state lab for testing.

Q: How many tests are there?

A: State health labs are limited in how many tests they are able to process, so we will only send samples for testing if the person is suspected of being infected based on a clinical screening and other respiratory illness has been ruled out. The screening process is developed based on consultation with the Victoria County Public Health Department following the guidelines from the CDC.

Q: Who will test you?

A: The tests will be performed by a health care professional, and the health department will assist the healthcare provider in sending in those samples.

Q: How many tests have been administered, and how many tests have come back negative?

A: Based on Texas Department of State Health Services recommendations and patient privacy concerns, we will not disclose information about how many tests have been administered or how many tests have been negative. Thus far, there have been no positive tests in Victoria County.

Q: Are negative tests reported to the CDC?

A: No. Negative tests are reported at the state level but are not reported to the CDC.

Q: What is the length of time for results of specimens sent to the state lab?

A: Results are expected to take about 2-4 days but could take longer depending on lab capacity. While patients are awaiting results of testing, they will be monitored and isolated.

Q: Does the CDC's recommendation to cancel public gatherings include school, church, etc.?

A: Guidance issued by the CDC on Sunday, March 15, states that “examples of large events and mass gatherings include conferences, festivals, parades, concerts, sporting events, weddings, and other types of assemblies.” The CDC recommends that people attending schools and community services take precautions such as frequent handwashing and social distancing. Detailed guidelines for schools, workplaces and community locations are available at [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/guidelines.html).

Questions about what I should do

Q: What should I do to protect myself from getting infected?

A: Take the same precautions that you would to protect yourself from the flu or other respiratory illnesses. Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds, cover your coughs and sneezes, clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Q: I'm planning to travel to a city that has reported cases of COVID-19. Should I cancel my plans?

A: The health department and CDC can provide you with up-to-date information on where the virus has been reported and the risks associated with visiting those places. If you do decide to travel, you should be especially cautious and self-monitor in case you develop any symptoms.

Q: Is it true that there are different coronaviruses?

A: The coronavirus that you've been hearing about on the news is part of a family of coronaviruses that cause different types of illnesses, including the common cold and more flu-like illnesses. The new virus, which you may have heard referred to as "the COVID-19 virus" or simply "the new coronavirus," is one that first appeared in China in December and then spread to other parts of the world.

Q: What makes this virus different from other coronaviruses or respiratory illnesses?

A: In terms of symptoms, it's not that different; they are similar. Most people who get this virus will only have a mild illness, although older people and people with other health problems are more at risk for serious complications.

The fact that this virus is so new means, first, that there's no vaccine, which is why it's so difficult to keep it from spreading. And, second, we have very limited information about it. But as time goes on, researchers will learn more about it and hopefully develop a vaccine.

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The symptoms are similar to the flu and could include fever, coughing, sore throat and shortness of breath.

Q: I think I or someone I know might have COVID-19. What should I do?

A: Don't go to a health care facility without calling first. Call your doctor or health care provider, and they'll ask you some questions to determine whether you might be infected.

Most people who are otherwise in good health will have only a mild reaction to the virus, similar to a flu reaction. But even if you have a mild case, please stay home if you are sick and do your part to protect the health of your community.

Q: What if I do not have a primary care physician?

A: Call ahead to your local urgent care facility. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, call your local hospital or emergency room. If you call 911, let the dispatcher know you suspect you have COVID-19.

Q: Should people donate blood during this time? Are blood donations being screened?

A: The South Texas Blood and Tissue Center is encouraging people to donate blood because blood supplies are low as blood drives are being canceled. Donors will be asked questions about travel history and may be asked to delay donations based on suspected exposure. This is done out of an abundance of caution; respiratory illnesses are not believed to be spread through blood transfusions.

For more information, visit:

www.victoriatxoem.org

<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>