



March 5, 2020

Dear Nebraskans:

I am writing to let you know the Department of Health and Human Services is taking steps to be prepared for the arrival of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in our state. Although there have been no cases of this illness identified in Nebraska residents, we continue to urge citizens to plan ahead and prepare.

Outlined below are seven key things I want every Nebraskan to know about our preparedness efforts.

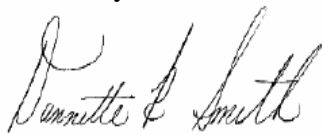
- 1. We have dedicated teams working to address this public health threat.** Several of our internal teams made up of public health and emergency response experts are meeting daily with other partners to share the latest science and information about COVID-19, plan strategy, enhance response plans and develop communication. DHHS has leading public health experts on its team who have extensive experience responding to disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies and they are committed to protecting Nebraskans and preventing the spread of disease.
- 2. We are assessing our own continuity of operations plans to maintain delivery of services.** So that we can continue to provide those necessary support services to our clients, we are ensuring that the appropriate operational infrastructure is in place.
- 3. We are working closely with local health departments and health care providers.** We are sharing the latest guidance and information through our extensive Health Alert Network to ensure a well-coordinated response in Nebraska. We are also assessing our health care system's readiness to identify, monitor and treat patients with COVID-19.
- 4. We are in active and ongoing communication with federal officials** and other state and federal partners as part of the overall national response to COVID-19.
- 5. We are monitoring Nebraskans returning from countries with community transmission of COVID-19.** These efforts ensure timely medical care if needed and minimize potential risk to others.
- 6. We are facilitating confirmatory testing, isolation and monitoring of Nebraskans experiencing symptoms to identify cases as soon as possible.** Nebraska's State Public Health Lab was one of the first labs in the country to receive federal approval to conduct COVID-19 testing, which means we can conduct testing right here at home and have results quickly.

7. **We all have a role to play and you can help.** Protect yourself and others from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, such as the flu, by taking the following actions:

- **Stay home if you are sick** and avoid close contact with those who are sick.
- **Wash hands often with soap and water** for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze** then throw the tissue in the trash.
- **Clean and disinfect frequently** touched objects and surfaces.
- **Make the same family plans and kits** that people may use for flu season or severe weather season.

We understand that people may have questions and concerns. Our goal is to communicate factual and useful information that helps keep Nebraskans informed. Our teams will continue to closely monitor developments and evaluate preparedness plans should we need to take action. We will keep you informed on next steps through updates on the DHHS website and communication with local health departments. I encourage you to learn more at the [Department's Covid-19 webpage](#) and the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Sincerely,



Dannette R. Smith, MSW  
Chief Executive Officer  
Department of Health and Human Services