



COVID-19

novel coronavirus

COVID 19 - COMMUNITY UPDATE – GLOBAL SPREAD 3-15-20

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 virus had fulfilled the necessary criteria to cause a pandemic:

- *New virus, no one has immunity; and*
- *Able to make people sick; and*
- *Able to spread easily among people*

The questions we know everyone is wondering about are: *“But they just announced this last Wednesday, how can there be cases in Allen County Indiana already?” “Why are you recommending all of these school closures now, won’t it take a while to get here?”* The answer is no, and for the reasons below, it is already here...

In China in late November of 2019, a new virus was created that previously was only found in animals. This illness, triggered by a virus now known as COVID-19, affected people’s respiratory system – some just in the upper airway, but in some people it caused lung disease. Unfortunately, people who were initially sick with this new virus looked like they had influenza as the symptoms are quite similar. It was not until a large number of them did not get better by treating it as the flu, that they realized this was something new. On December 31, 2019, China alerted the World Health Organization they were seeing a large number of unusual cases of pneumonia.

As you can imagine, during this timeframe mentioned above, people were traveling in and out of China. *Thus, COVID-19 starts its journey around the world...*

After realizing they were dealing with a new and never before seen virus, Chinese doctors and scientists began to develop the testing needed to identify just what they were working with. To their credit, by January 7, 2020, they were able to identify COVID-19 – a virus very similar to the SARS virus of 2003. The SARS virus however, never mutated such that it could spread easily person to person. That is why it never became a pandemic and less than 10,000 people worldwide were affected. Unfortunately, that is not true of COVID-19.

People had continued to travel in and out of China and COVID-19 continued its journey around the world. Some occurrences of significance:

- The first case of COVID-19 outside of China occurred in Thailand on January 13, 2020. This was evidence that the virus was no longer simply a resident of China.

And still, people continued to travel in and out of China and COVID-19 continued its journey around the world.

- On January 17, 2020, when the extent of the transmission became clear in China, the United States started screening and quarantining people who were coming from the affected province in China.



COVID-19

novel coronavirus

However, the people who had already been in that province for the past several weeks had already left, and were by then in the communities all around the world. And so COVID-19 is still continuing its journey around the world, including Allen County.

I could add a great deal more here to continue the timeline explanation regarding the spread of the virus, but you can see by now, that COVID-19 has been spreading globally from its initial evolution into a human virus. Likely, a significant number of people from our community have been traveling and ultimately been exposed since the virus emerged. We, too, just did not know what it was.

And that is how three days after a pandemic is declared we can find ourselves already inundated with positive cases and exposures. COVID-19 has likely been in our community for weeks; there just is not the current testing available to identify it.

ALL OF THIS IS WHY our goal is not to stop the virus from *coming*, but rather to *slow the transmission* of illness to a pace our healthcare workers can handle.

But, we can do this... together!

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Deborah A. McMahan in black ink.

Deborah A. McMahan, MD
Health Commissioner

Handwritten signature of Mindy Waldron in black ink.

Mindy Waldron, REHS CFSP
Department Administrator

Handwritten signature of Erika Pitcher in black ink.

Erika Pitcher, MPH
Community Health
Case Mgmt Director