

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW RIVER HEALTH DISTRICT OPERATES PUBLIC HEALTH HOTLINE

(CHRISTIANSBURG, Virginia) – Anyone with questions about COVID-19, including local and statewide conditions, symptoms, who should be tested and how that is done, how to minimize the risk of exposure for yourself and your loved ones and what to do if you think you may be ill, can call the New River Health District public health hotline at 540-267-8240. The hotline is presently staffed Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

“Residents should understand that testing for COVID-19 and other illnesses is a specific medical procedure that must be ordered by a medical professional,” said Noelle Bissell, M.D., director of the New River Health District. “Testing capacity is limited so we want to make sure we use those resources for people with conditions that match the test’s intended use.”

“There are many different respiratory illnesses and they have many different causes,” Dr. Bissell continued. “For someone with respiratory illness, the first test is to determine whether they have the flu. If the flu test is negative, a patient will be tested for a series of other respiratory (non-coronavirus) illnesses. If the first two tests are negative, then a test for coronavirus may be warranted.”

“The vast majority – more than 95 percent - of those with respiratory illnesses are sick for some reason other than coronavirus,” said Dr. Bissell. According to the World Health Organization, among those tested for coronavirus in the U.S., only about five percent are confirmed to be infected with the coronavirus. Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, puts the figure at closer to two percent.

“If you think you are ill, *DO NOT GO* to the hospital emergency room. Call your doctor or the VDH hotline,” said Dr. Bissell. “The hotline is designed to provide effective screening for COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. Those needing additional check-up or testing will receive instructions on how best to proceed.”

In the meantime, seasonal flu is still widespread in Virginia and anyone who has not been vaccinated this season is encouraged to do so. Contact your doctor or call your local health department to make an appointment.

For information on the New River Health District, visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/new-river>. For information on COVID-19 and ways to protect yourself and those you love, visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus>.

The Montgomery County Public Health Task Force, comprised of local government, public safety, education and health agencies works to proactively provide local residents and communities with accurate, up to date and effective information about COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. For information, visit www.montva.com/coronavirus.