

**COVID 19 UPDATE 4/3/2020    Richard Williams, MD MPH, Three Rivers Health District Director**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to accelerate domestically and worldwide. The US is leading in case counts now, due to disease spread and the fact that we are finding more cases with increased testing capacity. World mortality rate is about 5%. Our overall mortality rate in the US thus far is about 2.5%. Italy, where the health care system has been overwhelmed, has about a 12% mortality rate. In Virginia our mortality rate is less than 2%. US Hospitalization data are confirming age and underlying conditions as risk factors for severe disease, with diabetes, chronic lung disease and cardiovascular disease most commonly reported. There are many younger folks hospitalized with more serious disease, though. Locally we have 18 cases in the Three Rivers Health District thus far, with no deaths.

Social distancing appears to be having a positive effect in countries where it was employed early and aggressively.

The virus is very insidious and infectious. Virus shedding and transmission is being observed 48 hours prior to beginning of symptoms, and we have adjusted our contact investigations to accommodate this data. Testing has been a great challenge. Rapid point of care testing are becoming available and antibody tests are being developed but locally we remain limited to state lab and commercial lab testing with nasopharyngeal swabbing. Test result turn around time is improving. We are very concerned that the true burden of disease is much greater than testing indicates. Many minimally symptomatic patients are not tested or tracked, and the false negative rate of currently employed tests might be much higher than expected. This means the risk of exposure in our communities is high and getting higher.

In the health department, we are still doing case and contact identification, isolation, and quarantine in an attempt to reduce the infection rate. We will shift to disease tracking when case loads exceed our capacity to continue mitigation efforts. Hospitals are preparing surge capability in anticipation of peak case loads between late April and late May. PPE supplies remain critically short, and most health care facilities are employing PPE conservation and re-use measures.

**We are very pleased that Governor Northam issued the stay at home order. We are seeing varying compliance, we think compliance will improve with stronger risk messaging as the cases increase. Social distancing, and denying the virus the chance to spread from one of us to another, is at present our best and only defense against this disease. Staying at home as much as possible, and minimizing the time we spend in large shopping venues, is vitally important. If anyone becomes sick, stay at home and contact your health care provider. If anyone gets short of breath, seek medical care quickly. STAY HOME, STAY SAFE!**