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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Bertie County stands ready to respond in the event of local outbreak of Coronavirus**

*County personnel and local healthcare partners encourage citizens to stay aware as hysteria flares*

**WINDSOR, N.C.** – With the announcement of the first confirmed case of Coronavirus in Wake County on Tuesday, Bertie County and Bertie County Emergency Services are proactively preparing for the potential spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Currently, there are no suspected cases of the virus here.

Emergency Services Director, Mitch Cooper, notes that all local healthcare and community partners stand ready to respond in the event of a local outbreak.

“We have practiced similar drills in the past such as with the Ebola outbreak of 2018. This is nothing new, but our biggest priority is encouraging citizens to simply be aware and cognizant of basic hygiene and infection prevention,” he said today.

Citizens can prepare and help prevent infection by following basic hygiene including: proper hand washing often throughout the day with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, covering the nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, as well as making a strong effort to abstain from touching the eyes, face, and mouth.

It is also recommended to stay home when you are sick, clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces such as cell phones, remote controls, elevator buttons, door knobs, shopping cart handles, vehicle controls/steering wheels, and to avoid contact with those who are sick or have recently traveled from the outbreaks’ epicenter.

In an update supplied to their service area yesterday, Albemarle Regional Health Services advises, “Facemasks should [only] be used by people who are [already] showing symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.”

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, shortness of breath, and coughing. If a citizen is experiencing these symptoms and believe they have been exposed to COVID-19, their first step should be to call and speak with their nearest Emergency Room.

“Healthcare workers are our first line of defense during these outbreaks. They need to be aware in advance of any suspected COVID-19 carrier before they enter the ER so that the appropriate protocols are initialized before the arrival of the patient,” Mr. Cooper added.

The source of information about the Coronavirus is just as important as the information itself. Citizens are encouraged to visit only credible sources to receive current updates on the outbreak.

Credible sources for updates on the outbreak include the Center for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS).

Mr. Cooper adds, “It is extremely important that we as citizens only share and disseminate information that is properly verified, especially on social media.”

In a statement posted online by NCDHHS, “[We are] working with federal and local health officials, health care providers and emergency management officials to protect the health and wellbeing of North Carolinians and preparing in case we do [discover more] infections in the State.”

While the risk of contracting Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, in the U.S. is currently low, the CDC recommends that anyone who has visited China in the past 14 days, and who is showing symptoms of the virus including fever, cough, and shortness of breath should immediately call their area healthcare provider and make them aware of their personal situation.

Individuals with a weakened immune system, the elderly, or those with underlying respiratory problems are particularly vulnerable. Per the CDC, in those who are young and healthy, symptoms are usually mild and do not require hospitalization.

“An outbreak of pneumonia of unknown etiology in Wuhan City, China was initially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 12, 2020, Chinese health officials publicly posted the genetic sequence of a novel coronavirus, related to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronaviruses, identified as the cause of illness. [Since then] numbers of cases have continued to increase and cases have been reported in multiple countries, including the U.S. The World Health Organization announced a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020,” the March 3rd update from NCDHHS continued.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency on January 31, 2020.

For the most up to date information about the Coronavirus, please visit [CDC.org](https://www.cdc.org), [WHO.int](https://www.who.int), and [NCDHHS.gov](https://www.ncdhhs.gov), as well as to “like” and follow all respective social media accounts, and the official Facebook page of Bertie County Government.

Media inquiries may be relayed to Emergency Services Director, Mitch Cooper, at 794-5302 or [mitch.cooper@bertie.nc.gov](mailto:mitch.cooper@bertie.nc.gov).

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