

# It was only a matter of time - the coronavirus is now in North Carolina

## What you need to know to avoid infection

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

It's been over 100 years since the world has experienced a pandemic. In 1918, the Spanish Flu infected an estimated 500 million people with an estimated 20 to 50 million deaths, including about 675,000 Americans.

Compare those statistics to the current rate of infections of the coronavirus. Since the coronavirus (now called SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19) was first detected in China in early January, over 80,000 people have been sickened and nearly 3,000 have died in China alone. The virus continues to spread around the world with few countries escaping the contagion.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, coronavirus has affected about 80,000 people worldwide, while the flu has affected at least 29 million people and caused 16,000 deaths in the United States this season alone. The rate of death from the coronavirus is extremely low; only about 2 percent of people who have contracted COVID-19 have died. Those who are older or who have chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of being seriously affected. There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

At the date The Chronicle went to press, North Carolina had its first case of the coronavirus in Wake County, reported to be a person who had traveled to Washington state, where several infections and deaths have been reported.

What do we know about the coronavirus?

According to Dr. David Priest, Novant Health senior vice president and chief safety and quality officer, it's more likely that you will come down with the flu than the coronavirus at this time, although it is spreading within the U.S. and more cases will be identified.

The most common symptoms are a fever, respiratory illness and shortness of breath.

"Across Novant Health, we have standard protocols in place to ensure we are prepared to care for patients who may have come into contact with emerging infectious diseases," said Priest. "This includes a patient travel history screening and a mask-wearing policy for certain presenting symptoms. This is a rapidly evolving situation and we are working closely with national, state and local health departments to protect our patients and team members."

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

"During flu season, we always want to make sure we're washing our hands, covering our mouths when we cough and not going to work or to school when we're ill," Priest said.

Everyone should keep these things in mind to stay germ-free:

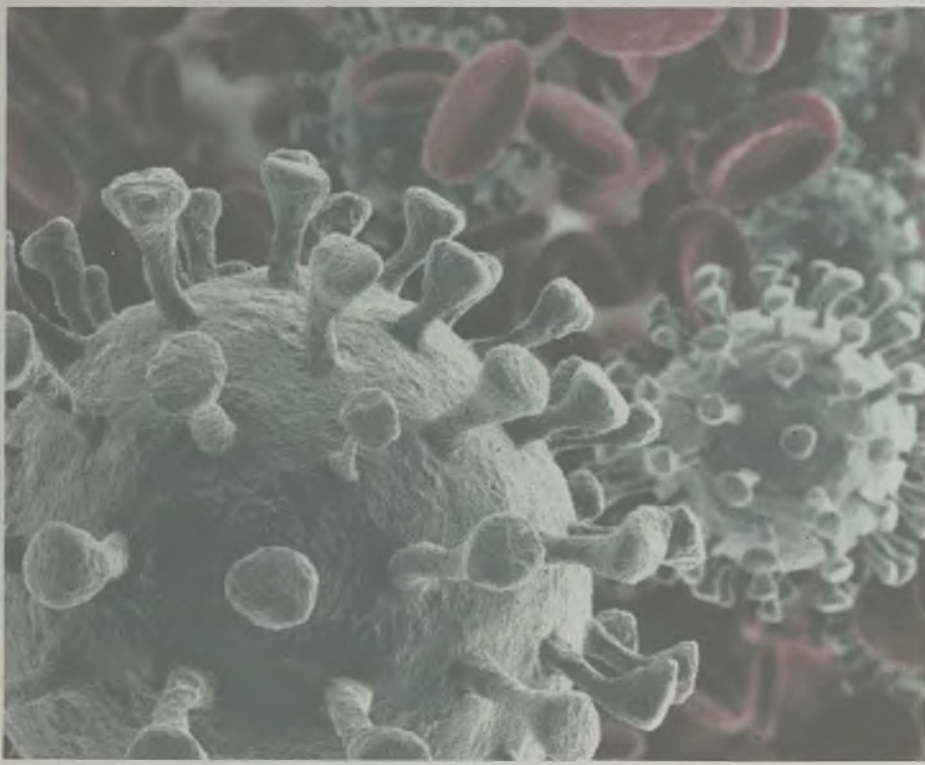
\*Wash your hands with soap and water frequently, or use hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your nose or face.

\*Avoid touching door-knobs; Use your elbow or shoulder to push doors open.

\*If someone is sick, they should sleep alone to avoid spreading illness to loved ones.

\*Avoid shaking hands or other personal contact if you are ill or with anyone else who is ill.

\*Do not go to work or school if you have an illness like the flu. You



coronavirus

should not return until you have not had a fever for 24 hours and you have stopped taking fever-reducing medication.

Health officials are not recommending people with mild respiratory or flu symptoms to overreact and immediately flock to emergency departments or urgent care centers, but instead to stay home and self-quarantine until their fever has been gone for at least 24 hours and other symptoms have decreased.


Some churches have already announced adjustments to their services, such as avoiding handshakes or hugs during the "passing of the peace," instead offering a friendly wave to fellow parishioners.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools is also being proactive as they are collaborating with the Forsyth County Department of Public Health and other local and regional health organizations to plan for the possible spread of the virus. Brent Campbell, WS/FCS spokesman, said that the district's cleaning crews "are being given instructions to do extra cleaning and disinfecting of hard surfaces."

Winston-Salem is also home to many events, including concerts, sporting events and tourist destinations that attract significant crowds. With March Madness upon us, the NCAA and ACC are both monitoring the situation as they prepare for the upcoming tournaments. The ACC issued a statement that said in part, "As part of the preparations, we remain in communication with our institutions, local and state health authorities and the NCAA. We will also continue following the guidelines outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."


RiverRun International Film Festival, which begins March 27 and runs through April 5, could also be affected by the spread of the virus. Executive Director Rob Davis said that the festival is keeping a close eye on the latest developments, and that none of their international guests appearing at the festival are from areas where outbreaks are currently taking place.

Joshua Swift, Forsyth County Public Health Director said, "The Forsyth County Department of Public Health is working with the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), other local health departments and health care providers as well as community partners, including the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Emergency Management Office, to prepare for any future potential local cases."



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