Big Sur Health Center has been monitoring the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak closely. We are aware that there is a lot of concern about this novel Coronavirus illness that started in Wuhan, China late last year. We are working with local healthcare organizations, Monterey County Health Department, California Department of Public Health, and above all, following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on protocols for addressing any potential cases.

As of March 6th, there have been no documented cases of COVID-19 in Monterey County.

Currently, the best protection from COVID 19 and other seasonal infections, including Influenza, is to avoid close contact with other people who have a respiratory illness. **Your risk of contracting Influenza is much greater than the risk of exposure to COVID-19.** Over the past month or so, we have confirmed 7 cases of influenza and treated many folks with “garden variety” colds and flu. If you have not gotten your flu shot yet for this season, it is not too late. In this season of colds and flu, Big Sur Health Center will continue to provide care for people who are ill and take precautions to preserve the health of the community.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call Big Sur Health Center at 831-667-2580

In addition, you can find up-to-date information on COVID-19 at the CDC website: https://www.cdc.gov/media/dpk/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus-2020.html

**Coronavirus FAQs from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Protection)**

**Can I get tested for the virus at my doctor’s office or at the hospital?** Testing for the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can only be done by public health authorities. Currently, only people who meet certain criteria are being tested. Criteria include both symptoms and likely or known exposure to a person with COVID-19. If you are not having any symptoms or if you are having symptoms but no exposure, CDC recommends that you not be tested at this time.

*(Sample collection kits will be available at Big Sur Health Center soon. We will update you as soon as we have additional information).*

**Should I come to the hospital if I am ill and think I have COVID-19?** In order to minimize the chance of spreading contagious viral illnesses within the community, if you are not severely ill it is advised that you stay home and first call your doctor for advice. If you do not have a doctor, you should call the health department (831)755-4500. If you have a severe illness, have difficulty breathing or are unable to care for your symptoms at home, then you should seek urgent or emergent medical care. You should wear a mask outside the home and inform the healthcare providers immediately upon arrival of
your symptoms and exposure to COVID-19. If possible, call the healthcare facility in advance of your arrival to allow them time to prepare to avoid unnecessary exposures.

**What are the current criteria for being tested for COVID-19?** Currently, criteria for testing include the presence of both symptoms and exposure to COVID-19. If you have a fever and cough or shortness of breath as well as direct contact with someone known to have COVID-19 or travel in the last 14 days from China, South Korea, Japan, Iran or Italy, then the health department would arrange for testing. There are also allowances for testing people who have a fever and severe lung infection without other obvious causes, such as Influenza infection or pneumonia. These cases would be assessed individually by local county health officials.

**Will wearing a mask protect me from getting infected?** If you are not ill with a cough or other upper respiratory illness then it is not advised to wear masks for protection at this time. It is possible that improper use of a mask by people who are well may actually put you at a higher risk of getting a respiratory virus infection. Healthcare workers who will be in direct contact with infected people should wear a mask for protection. People who are ill with a respiratory infection should also wear a mask when away from home to prevent spreading the infection to people around them.

**How can I protect myself from getting infected?** Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer frequently and always before eating. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth or face with unwashed hands. Avoid close contact with other people who have a respiratory illness. Frequently wipe down high touch surfaces like kitchen countertops and bathroom surfaces with disinfecting wipes. If you do become sick, stay home to avoid spreading illness in the community.