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STATEMENT FROM THE WEST VIRGINIA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION REGARDING THE FIRST CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19 IN WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON, WV – Joe Letnaunchyn, President and CEO of the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA), provides the following statement regarding the State's first confirmed case of COVID-19:

Following the confirmation of West Virginia's first confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) case by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) is working with state and local public health officials to assist hospitals as they appropriately respond to COVID-19 cases.

West Virginia hospitals have not only been planning for weeks for this specific scenario, but routinely review and practice emergency preparedness procedures to mitigate the spread of infectious disease.

While many West Virginia hospitals have activated their emergency response plans, they also are maintaining their regular hospital operations. Those facilities that are treating possible COVID-19 patients are working with their local health departments and others in the healthcare community to follow appropriate protocol that minimizes the risk of exposure for all other patients and hospital employees.

Our healthcare professionals treat infectious disease and respond to medical emergencies daily, throughout West Virginia. The medical staff involved in the treatment of COVID-19 patients, from physicians and nurses to support staff, all deserve our sincere gratitude and support as they work to keep our communities healthy and safe.

What the public needs to know

The WVHA encourages the public to review the guidelines established by their local hospital pertaining to infection prevention before visiting the facility.

Maintain Regularly Scheduled Healthcare Appointments

While the public is encouraged to increase prevention efforts, it is important that existing health needs are met and addressed. Over the last couple of days, we've seen hospitals in West Virginia revising patient care procedures to help increase capacity in several areas. Some hospitals are reviewing and rescheduling elective procedures, while maintaining the safety and health of patients as a top priority. Hospitals are also utilizing virtual visits through telehealth, when appropriate. Contact your community hospital to find out if an appointment should be kept.

Clinical settings are also taking the necessary precautions to promote a sterile, safe space for their patients. We continue to urge patients who have COVID-19 symptoms, who need to be seen but are not experiencing an emergency, to call their primary care provider's office for guidance before traveling to any healthcare facility in person. If you do not have a healthcare provider, call your local hospital or primary care center for a referral.

Most People Will Experience Only Mild Illness

As a reminder, many people who become infected with COVID-19 may experience mild to no symptoms, which can be treated by supportive care and without hospitalization. We ask that the public continue to follow precautions that we historically follow to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, such as the flu or the common cold, by practicing everyday prevention measures like frequent hand washing, staying home when sick, and covering coughs and sneezes. Additionally, prevention information is available from the CDC.

Contact Your Healthcare Provider If You Experience Severe Symptoms

Severe respiratory symptoms are associated with COVID-19 and should be addressed immediately. Remember to contact your provider before arriving at a facility so that the necessary protocol can be followed to protect your health, your caregivers and other patients at the facility.

Only Visit the Emergency Department If You Have an Emergency

Only in case of an emergency injury or illness should someone visit the Emergency Department. Individuals with minor injuries or illness are recommended to visit an urgent care clinic or their primary care provider. West Virginia hospitals and healthcare providers are committed to providing timely and high-quality care in the most appropriate setting.

The WVHA's role in COVID-19 response

Every day, the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) represents West Virginia hospitals at the state and federal levels to support their efforts to provide quality, cost-effective and accessible care and ensure healthy individuals and communities. The WVHA can provide a statewide perspective on hospital emergency preparedness and response efforts regarding infectious disease, including COVID-19. The WVHA is actively working with all member hospitals throughout the state, as well as state policymakers in Charleston and in Washington DC. This includes the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and the American Hospital Association, among many others, to provide the latest updates and resources on COVID-19.

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