

RST Statement on COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Panics over the spread of viruses have historically found scapegoats, such as refugees, to be easy targets to pin the blame on. Not only is such targeting unwarranted and factually in error, it can also do short-term and long-term damage to refugee communities.

With the rise of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), it's more important than ever to get the facts straight and remind the public that refugees do not pose a health risk of any kind, and in fact continue to positively contribute to our state and our nation's economy and society as refugees have always done.

We do not know of any cases of COVID-19 being contracted or transmitted by any refugee in Texas. The virus tends to be transmitted by travelers, not refugees. It's important to remember that the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low in the United States.

The vast majority of the illnesses around the world are mild, with fever and cough. A much smaller percentage of cases are severe and involve pneumonia, particularly in elderly people and people with underlying medical conditions.

At this critical time in the fight against the virus, it is important that we access reliable sources. Changes are occurring frequently, so reviewing and monitoring reputable websites is the best way to stay informed.

Situational Updates

- Current national updates are available at [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- Current statewide updates are available at [Texas Department of State Health Services](#). The Texas Department of State Health Services has a dedicated call center to answer your questions or concerns. **1-877-570-9779**.
- The local health department for your area will have the most current local information. Depending on the spread of COVID-19, public health officials could recommend actions to slow the spread of the disease and protect the health of communities. Here are the COVID-19 websites for local health departments:
 - [Abilene Public Health](#)
 - [Amarillo Public Health](#)
 - [Austin Public Health](#)
 - [Dallas County Public Health](#)
 - [Harris County Public Health](#)
 - [Tarrant County Public Health](#)

- [San Antonio Public Health](#)

Symptoms of COVID-19

Fever, cough, and shortness of breath. At this time, the CDC believes that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure.

Current Risk

- The general American public is unlikely to be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 at this time, so the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.
- Travelers returning from affected [international locations](#) where community spread is occurring are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Keep in mind that our knowledge of COVID-19 is still rapidly evolving.

Prevention

The recommended ways to protect oneself from a virus and prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses are:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Please consider posting this [Wash Your Hands Poster](#).
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

How COVID-19 Spreads

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Can someone spread the virus without being sick?

- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The CDC recommends that people stay home if they are sick, except to seek medical care if necessary (e.g., worsening illness with more severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing). If a person needs to seek care, they should call ahead to allow the healthcare provider's office to take appropriate steps to minimize risk to others if COVID-19 is suspected.

Refugee-specific Overseas Measures

Per CDC, currently there are no refugee-specific COVID-19 protocols in place. However, they continue to monitor the global situation closely. Movement has been postponed for those few refugees that we have coming out of China. No refugees are resettling from South Korea, Iran, or Italy (other higher incidence countries). CDC has advised IOM to book refugees on flights that do not transit through these locations. At this point, refugees continue to receive pre-departure screening as usual. CDC has also reiterated the practice of infection control measures during transit.

Myths and Scams

It is also important to understand [Myths](#) related to COVID-19. Unfortunately, there are already scams being reported regarding "cures" for COVID-19 in refugee and immigrant communities. For example, there is currently a video circulating where a woman speaking Swahili is promoting a medication that will reportedly cure all types of sicknesses and diseases, including coronaviruses.

Translated Materials

[Wash your Hands Poster in Multiple Languages](#)

[Cover Your Cough Poster in Multiple Languages](#)

[Switchboard COVID-19 Materials](#) (will update as materials are added)

[Novel Coronavirus Fact Sheet \(WA\) in Multiple Languages](#) The state of Washington is translating the fact sheet into additional refugee languages and will update this site as they are available.

[City of Austin COVID-19 Materials](#) (available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese Simplified](#), [Chinese Traditional](#), [Vietnamese](#), [Korean](#), [Urdu](#), [Arabic](#), and [Burmese](#).)

Planning resources

The Washington Dept. of Health has a guide on [Outbreak Preparedness for Communities and Community Organization](#) that discusses hygiene, social distancing, and isolation and quarantine.