Answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19
Questions about what officials are doing

Q: What is Victoria doing to prevent the arrival or spread of COVID-19?

A: The Victoria County Public Health Department is monitoring the situation in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management, the City of Victoria, first responders and health care and education officials to determine best practices to protect people from catching or spreading the virus. The health department gets regular updates from the CDC and other sources, so these decisions are based on the latest available information.

Q: What do the cases elsewhere in the Crossroads mean for Victoria?

A: Victoria's response to cases outside the city and county depends on a variety of factors, and not all of those factors are apparent right away. The health department will continue to work with its local partners (Office of Emergency Management, first responders, health care officials) to determine whether the new cases that have been identified in our area present an elevated risk for Victoria County and whether the plans that are already in place need to be updated based on that.

Q: Has anyone in Victoria gotten sick?

A: As of March 29, there have been 6 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Victoria County. The health department will communicate information about new confirmed cases through all available channels.

Q: What information can be released at what times about patients?

A: If there is a confirmed case, the health department will release some basic details such as the person's age, how they were exposed to the virus and what steps are being taken to contain the infection. The health department will not release any identifying information about the person.

Q: Will any public events in Victoria be canceled?

A: The City of Victoria and Victoria County will take steps to cancel City- and County-sponsored public events that would attract gatherings that would exceed guidelines established by the CDC. Under orders issued by Mayor Rawley McCoy and County Judge Ben Zeller in line with CDC recommendations, social gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited within Victoria County.

Q: How will this impact local EMTs and first responders?

A: Our first responders, which include EMTs and dispatchers, are continually updating their procedures based on discussions with the health department and the Office of Emergency Management so that they can respond effectively to suspected COVID-19 cases and limit

exposure for themselves and others. That includes asking questions about travel history to determine whether someone might have been exposed, and it also includes wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks and making sure that, if they have to bring someone to a hospital who has COVID-19-like symptoms, the hospital is aware of that so they can prepare. These are measures that will not only protect our first responders but will keep the virus from spreading if someone does have it.

Q: I heard that there's an infected person at Citizens/DeTar and they're not telling us…

A: The health department has committed to immediately releasing information about confirmed cases to the public. That information will be posted on their Facebook page and their website and sent as a press release to local media outlets, and it will also be shared through the city and county social media accounts and www.victoriatxoem.org

Q: Does Victoria County have the ability to test for COVID-19?

A: There are a variety of physicians and urgent care clinics in the area, along with our specimen collection site, that collect samples from patients suspected of having COVID-19. The samples will be sent to a state or private lab for testing.

Q: How many tests are there/why won't my health provider test me?

A: Public health labs are limited in how many tests they are able to process, so they will only send samples for testing if the person is suspected of having COVID-19 based on a clinical screening and if other respiratory illness has been ruled out. In order to send samples to a public health lab, providers must consult with the Victoria County Public Health Department, which follows guidelines from the Department of State Health Services. Health care providers are also able to send specimens to a commercial lab only if the patient meets certain criteria.

Q: Who will test you?

A: Samples will be collected by a health care professional, and the health care provider will then send those samples to a lab for testing.

Q: Will the health department test me?

A: The health department is only able to collect select specimens that require special handling or under special circumstances in coordination with health care providers. You should reach out to a medical provider if you think you need a test.

Q: How many tests have been administered, and how many tests have come back negative?

A: Victoria County Public Health Department estimates that it has received notice of 300+ tests performed; however, this does not include all of the tests performed by private labs. Private labs are required by law to report positive tests to the health department. The only positive tests in Victoria County are the ones that have been reported by the health department.

Q: Are negative tests reported to the CDC?

A: No. If a person tests positive at a state or private lab, the test is sent to the CDC for confirmation. Negative tests are not forwarded to the CDC for further testing.

Q: What is the length of time for results of specimens sent to the state lab?

A: Results are expected to take about 2-5 days but could take longer depending on lab capacity. While patients are awaiting results of testing, they will be monitored and isolated along with their family and household members.

Q: I heard that there's a specimen collection site at the community center. What are the hours of operation?

A: The mobile collection site is open Tuesdays and Fridays 8 a.m. to noon. We have the staff and PPE to operate the site for the foreseeable future and will seek to adjust frequency as needed.

Q: Can I go there to get tested?

A: You must have a physician's order to have a sample taken. Samples are not tested on-site; rather, they are sent to an outside lab for testing.

Questions about what I should do

Q: What should I do to protect myself from getting infected?

A: Take the same precautions that you would to protect yourself from the flu or other respiratory illnesses. Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds, cover your coughs and sneezes, clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Q: I'm planning to travel to a city that has reported cases of COVID-19. Should I cancel my plans?

A: The health department and CDC can provide you with up-to-date information on where the virus has been reported and the risks associated with visiting those places. If you do decide to travel, you should be especially cautious and self-monitor in case you develop any symptoms.

Q: Is it true that there are different coronaviruses?

A: The coronavirus that you've been hearing about on the news is part of a family of coronaviruses that cause different types of illnesses, including the common cold and more flulike illnesses. The new virus, which you may have heard referred to as "the COVID-19 virus" or simply "the new coronavirus," is one that first appeared in China in December and then spread to other parts of the world.

Q: What makes this virus different from other coronaviruses or respiratory illnesses?

A: In terms of symptoms, it's not that different; they are similar. Most people who get this virus will only have a mild illness, although older people and people with other health problems are more at risk for serious complications.

The fact that this virus is so new means, first, that there's no vaccine, which is why it's so difficult to keep it from spreading. And, second, we have very limited information about it. But as time goes on, researchers will learn more about it and hopefully develop a vaccine.

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: The symptoms are similar to the flu and could include fever, coughing, sore throat and shortness of breath.

Q: I think I or someone I know might have COVID-19. What should I do?

A: Don't go to a health care facility without calling first. Call your doctor or health care provider, and they'll ask you some questions to determine whether you might be infected.

Most people who are otherwise in good health will have only a mild reaction to the virus, similar to a flu reaction. But even if you have a mild case, please stay home if you are sick and do your part to protect the health of your community.

Q: What if I do not have a primary care physician?

A: Call ahead to your local urgent care facility. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, call your local hospital or emergency room. If you call 911, let the dispatcher know you suspect you have COVID-19.

Q: Should people donate blood during this time? Are blood donations being screened?

A: The South Texas Blood and Tissue Center is encouraging people to donate blood because blood supplies are low as blood drives are being canceled. Donors will be asked questions about travel history and may be asked to delay donations based on suspected exposure. This is done out of an abundance of caution; respiratory illnesses are not believed to be spread through blood transfusions.

Q: Can I take my child to a day care facility?

A: Texas Health and Human Services has issued guidance to licensed day care providers on how to screen children and visitors for COVID-19 and how to ensure sanitary conditions. Contact your local day care provider to find out what steps they are taking to keep people safe. For more information on licensing requirements, email Child Care Licensing at msc@hhsc.state.tx.us.

For more information, visit: www.victoriatxoem.org https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html