



GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico Tourism Company

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) TOURISM INDUSTRY PREPAREDNESS

March 2020

The Government of Puerto Rico, through the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, is providing guidance to the local travel and tourism sector in order to establish appropriate prevention, preparedness and response measures to reduce the potential risks associated with COVID-19 after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. As of March 3rd, Puerto Rico has no suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19, but given that community spread has been reported elsewhere in the Americas, the local population should remain alert and follow the simple guidance provided by State, National and International authorities.

Carla Campos
Executive Director



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Information for the General Public

Current Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019

There is an ongoing worldwide outbreak of a respiratory illness first identified in Wuhan, China, caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. Some coronaviruses can cause illness similar to the common cold and others can cause more serious diseases, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

On February 11, 2020 the World Health Organization [announced](#) an official name for the disease that is causing the current outbreak of coronavirus disease, COVID-19. COVID-19 has not been detected before this outbreak. Most people currently infected live in mainland China. There are cases of coronavirus reported in other countries.

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by a virus (more specifically, a [coronavirus](#)) identified as the source of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China. Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak in Wuhan, China reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, a growing number of patients reportedly have not had exposure to animal markets, indicating person-to-person spread is occurring.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include (but are not limited to) fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue and shortness of breath.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is most likely to spread from person to person through:

- direct contact with a person whilst they are infectious;
- contact with droplets when a person with a confirmed infection coughs or sneezes; or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) that were contaminated by droplets from secretions coughed or sneezed from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

For how long can a person spread the infection to other people?



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The length of time that a person is infectious, that is, can spread the infection to others, is not yet known. However, there has been emerging evidence of asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic infection and pre-symptomatic transmission in at least one case cluster. It is therefore likely that a person can spread the infection from before the time they first develop symptoms until up to one day after symptoms stop.

Therefore, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is currently recommending an isolation period of 14 days for returned travellers from mainland China, and for contacts of confirmed cases.

Who is most at risk of a serious illness?

Some people who are infected may not get sick at all, some will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily, and others may become very ill, very quickly.

From previous experience with other coronaviruses, the people at most risk of serious infection are:

- people with compromised immune systems;
- elderly people;
- very young children and babies;
- people with diagnosed heart and lung conditions; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.



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Travel Advice

U.S. citizens are urged to:

- Closely monitor [Travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) and [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for important information and updated travel advisories.
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid travelling if sick.
- Avoid cruises that depart from or travel to Asia.
- If you decide to travel to China discuss your travel with your healthcare provider. Older adults and travelers with underlying health issues may be at risk for more severe disease.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Follow local authority instructions from the Puerto Rico Department of Health.

Overarching measures and screening procedures at borders

Due to the current public health situation, many countries have begun implementing strict screening procedures in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Within the United States, the guidance is as follows:

- Any U.S. citizen returning to the United States who has been in Hubei province, China in the previous 14 days may be subject to up to 14 days of quarantine.
- Any U.S. citizen returning to the United States who has been in the rest of mainland China within the previous 14 days may undergo a health screening and possible self-quarantine.
- Please read these [Department of Homeland Security supplemental instructions](#) for further details.
- U.S. citizens are encouraged to monitor media and local information sources (the Government of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rico Department of Health) and factor updated information into personal travel plans and activities. You may also follow the U.S. Department of State on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
- If you travel, you should enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) to receive updates.



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Enhanced Disinfecting and Cleaning Measures

Step up cleaning of workplace premises

- More frequent cleaning of areas with high human contact, such as counters where customers are served and rooms where visitors are hosted.
- More frequent cleaning of general public access areas such as lifts, pantries, toilets, and trash can areas.
- Adopt the sanitation and hygiene advisories disseminated by the Puerto Rico Department of Health. Should a confirmed case or COVID-19 be reported in your premises, we recommend following the guidelines below for cleaning and disinfecting areas exposed.

Serving customers who are unwell or have flu-like symptoms

- Employers should establish clear guidance to frontline staff on how to handle customers who are unwell. For example, frontline workers can advise customers who are visibly unwell to go see a doctor immediately. Customers could also be asked to reschedule their appointments, or be served via alternate means.
- If it is necessary to provide urgent services to customers who are unwell, employers should also establish proper procedures to safeguard staff and other customers.



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Workplace Guidance for the Hospitality Industry

For updated guidance for businesses and employers to plan and respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), visit the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

General guidance from the CDC is provided below.

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

Separate sick employees:

- CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).



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Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:

- Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

Perform routine environmental cleaning:

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:

- Check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from China, and information for aircrew, can be found at on the [CDC website](#).
- Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
- If outside the United States, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, U.S. embassies,



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consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.

Additional Measures in Response to Currently Occurring Sporadic Importations of the COVID-19:

- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.

Criteria for minimizing risk of staff infection based on travel history

Hotel management should consult with the regional epidemiologist should questions arise about whether a staff member should be allowed to work based on travel history or symptoms.

In general, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC) recommends hotel staff **refrain from** working in hotels if they have:

- left, or transited through mainland China or Iran, Italy or South Korea in the last 14 days (they must isolate themselves at home for 14 days from leaving mainland China, Iran, Italy or South Korea)
- been in close contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days (they must isolate themselves for 14 days after the date of last contact with the suspected case or once negative results from the suspected case have been received).

If you develop symptoms within 14 days of being in Iran, China, South Korea, Italy, Japan or Hong Kong, or within 14 days of contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you should contact the regional epidemiologist and seek urgent medical care at a local hospital.



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I am an employer – what should I tell my staff?

Hotel management should provide information and brief all employees and contract staff, including domestic and cleaning staff, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to people in the hotel setting. You should inform staff who meet the above criteria that they should contact the regional epidemiologist who will evaluate criteria for travel and symptoms and determine if self-isolation or a medical evaluation is required. Workers should advise their employer if they develop symptoms during the isolation period, particularly if they have been in the workplace.

If you go on to develop symptoms and have previous travel history (within the past 14 days) to one of the COVID-19 affected areas, follow the following guidance:

- immediately isolate yourself from others in your home;
- call the regional epidemiologist or local hospital and tell them you **may** have COVID-19 infection; and
- when you get to the emergency room of the hospital, tell them again that you are presenting COVID-19 symptoms and have recent travel history to one of the places where community spreading has been reported; and
- as soon as possible, call your employer to notify them that you have developed symptoms and are receiving medical care.

If you have serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing:

- call **911** and ask for an ambulance; and
- tell the ambulance officers that you may have COVID-19 infection based on the above-mentioned symptoms and travel history criteria.

The hospital will follow the established screening and testing protocols, as applicable, and provide advice on your care. You will also be contacted by public health officers who will provide you with more information and who will coordinate with your employer as needed.

How can we help prevent the spread of the virus?

Practicing good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defense against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- avoid contact with others (touching, kissing, hugging, and other intimate contact)
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



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Guest Interactions: Preventing Infections & Controlling Potential Spread

Can hotel guests bring in the virus?

The risk of visitors who may be traveling to Puerto Rico while infected is currently low, as Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and the CDC have enhanced screening measures at all gateways. Nonetheless, it is important that the hotel provides patrons with information about COVID-19 to prevent spread upon their arrival to the hotel.

Preventive measures

Advice Upon Check-in At Reception

- Provide 70-80% alcohol-based hand sanitizers to guests in public areas
- Conduct a brief check on the guests' health conditions and travel history in the past 14 days to ascertain travel history to the affected areas.
- Provide all guests with leaflet with general guidance should they become ill during their stay.
- If possible, keep accurate records of events and details of those affected (i.e. name, room number, date and time of when they became ill, symptoms, duration of symptoms etc.).
- Seek medical advice from regional epidemiologist if you are concerned about any of your guests and contact 911 if you consider any case to need urgent medical attention.
- Hotel management should always keep a list of staff and guests who had stayed in the hotel, their period of stay (check-in and check-out dates), identification / passport number, age, sex, nationality, contact telephone number, for possible public health action in case the patient is confirmed to be infected with COVID-19.

For Guests with Feeling Unwell or with Positive Travel History

- Advise to observe good personal hygiene, especially on hand hygiene and proper cough manners.
- Guest(s) is/are advised to stay in the room if feeling unwell, wear a surgical mask and call the hotel operator at once for arrangement of medical consultation.
- Guest(s) is/are advised not to take private transport if developed respiratory symptoms.
- **The hotel should call the regional epidemiologist and provide guest details.** The epidemiologist will instruct the hotel of the protocol to follow should the patient be required to attend a hospital emergency room for further screening.



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What if hotel guest needs to self-isolate?

If hotel guest need to self-isolate in a hotel because they have been instructed to do so by CDC, CBP or local Health Department, it is important that management staff be informed and take precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. The risk to staff should be low if they wash their hands well and the guests do not have symptoms. Staff should avoid close contact with these guests but it is safe to be in the same room (at a distance) without protective equipment when delivering food, which we recommend that the guests have in their room.

Is it safe to clean a room for a self-isolated guest?

Cleaning staff should avoid close contact with guests who have self-isolated. They should wear gloves while cleaning, and use alcohol hand rub before and after wearing gloves. As an added precaution, your cleaning staff may wish to wear a surgical mask while cleaning the room. Before entering the room, cleaning staff may inquire if people are well, and ask them to put on a surgical mask.

What happens with our guest should the state epidemiologist determine the patient should seek medical attention/screening at a hospital?

Suspicious cases of COVID-19 infection (presenting symptoms and with travel history of visiting affected areas) must attend a local hospital's emergency room. The epidemiologist will provide guidance on transportation, should it be necessary.

Once the patient arrives at the emergency room, he/she will be given a surgical mask to avoid infecting other patients. The patient will be taken to a triage room where he or she will be asked about travel history. If the patient has visited an affected country, he/she will be taken to preventive isolation.

At the preventive isolation chamber, the doctor will proceed to get test samples for various respiratory conditions.

The Department of Health will be notified immediately and the information will be reported through various designated forms. The Department of Health will then arrange for the pickup of the test samples and will send them to a CDC lab for testing.

If the result is positive for COVID-19, the patient must remain in isolation during 14 days to receive adequate medical care.



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What if a guest that has stayed at our hotel tests positive for COVID-19?

- **The Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control will liaise with Hotel Management in order to establish clear protocol for action based on interaction of guest with hotel staff and other guests.**
- Hotel management should always keep a list of staff and guests who had stayed in the hotel, their period of stay (check-in and check-out dates), identification / passport number, age, sex, nationality, contact telephone number, for public health action.
- Disinfect all the surfaces that are potentially contaminated immediately with 1 in 49 diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite with 49 parts of water), leave for 15 – 30 minutes, and then rinse with water and wipe dry. The disinfection should include any potentially contaminated installations, equipment or traffic pathways used by the symptomatic guest, such as elevator control panels and the lobby. Responsible staff should put on a surgical mask, disposable gown and gloves, and face shield.
- If the place is contaminated with blood, secretions, vomitus or excretions, disinfect with 1 in 4 diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite with 4 parts of water), leave for 10 minutes, and then rinse with water and wipe dry.
- Depending on the situation, hotel management may need to suspend any mass gathering or social activities in the hotel.



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Directory of Epidemiologists by Region

Directorio de Epidemiología			
Nombre	Posición	Teléfono	Correo Electrónico
Nivel Central			
Carmen Deseda	Epidemióloga del Estado/Directora de la OEI	787-765-2929 Ext. 3551	carmen.deseda@salud.pr.gov
Carmen J. Rodríguez Caquías	Epidemióloga RSV y Enfermedades prevenibles por vacuna/ Consultoría de viajero internacional	765-2929 Ext. 3557	crodriguez@salud.pr.gov
Norma Díaz Paris	Coordinadora de infecciones adquiridas en hospital (HAI)	Cel. 787-692-6230 765-2929 Ext. 3832	nodiaz@salud.gov.pr
Karina González	Coordinadora de Influenza	787-765-2929 Ext. 3565	karina.gonzalez@salud.pr.gov
Melissa Bello	Coordinadora de vigilancia Bioseguridad	Cel: 787-692-6179 787-765-2929 Ext. 4327	mbello@salud.gov.pr
Oficinas Regionales			
Región Arecibo			
Juan Méndez	Epidemiólogo	Cel. 787-692-6273 787-765-2929 Exts. 6356, 6357 fax: 787-880-5538	jmendez@salud.gov.pr
Región Bayamón			
Yashira Maldonado	Epidemióloga	Cel. 787-692-6284 Fax: 787-995-0123 787-765-2929 Ext. 3754:	ymaldonado@salud.pr.gov
Región Caguas			
Jazmín Román	Epidemióloga	Cel. 787-692-6205 (787) 765- 2929 Ext. 4336	jroman@salud.pr.gov
Región Fajardo			
Edna I. Ponce	Epidemióloga	Cel. 787-692-6275 (787) 765-2929 Ext.3554 Fax: 787-863- 2841	eponce@salud.gov.pr
Región Mayagüez y Aguadilla			
Suheiry Cruz Medina	Epidemióloga regional & Leptospirosis	Cel. 787-692-6195 Mayagüez: 787-832- 3640/831-0262), Fax: 787-834-0095	suheiry.cruz@salud.pr.gov
Noelia Estevez Pérez	Supervisora de Enfermería	Aguadilla: 787-882-9092 Fax: 787-891-2045	nestevez@salud.pr.gov
Región Metro			
Melissa I. Bello Pagán	Epidemióloga	Cel. 787-692-6179 787-765-2929 X 4683	mbello@salud.gov.pr
Región Ponce			
María Ramos Zapata	Epidemióloga	Cel. 787-692-6272 787-765-2929 ext. 5705 787-841-4555	maramos@salud.gov.pr



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Contact information

Should you have any questions related to prevention and management protocols, please contact the PRTC's Emergency Management Coordinator at madeline.santiago@tourism.pr.gov or 787-525-4899.

In case of emergency contact Executive Director, Carla Campos at 787-356-7474.