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Health Agency Upgrades Coronavirus Risk to Caribbean From Low to 'Moderate to High'

Health / **Published On February 29, 2020 02:13 PM /**

Staff Consortium **February 29, 2020**

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PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, CMC – The Trinidad-based Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) has upgraded the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) disease transmission from low, to “moderate to high” even as there has been no confirmed case of the disease that killed nearly 3,000 people in several countries mainly in China and South Korea.

CARPHA said that transmission of the virus has been reported in territories with direct flights to Caribbean States.

CARPHA Executive Director, Dr. Joy St. John is urging health authorities of member states (CMS) to shift their mind set from preparedness to readiness and rapid response and continue to do all that is necessary to strengthen their capacity to respond to possible importation of cases.

She is also encouraging member states to increase their capacity for surveillance and to adapt their national pandemic preparedness plans to this current situation with COVID-19, as a matter of urgency.

As of Friday, there has been 83,704 cases of patients with COVID-19. Outside of China, 52 countries have confirmed at least one case among travellers exposed in China and/or person-to-person contact. Of the deaths reported to date, 50 were from outside of Mainland China and several new countries in Europe.

Several other countries including Pakistan Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iraq, and Nigeria have reported their first case of COVID-19 in the last 48 hours, while closer to the Caribbean region, in Latin America, Brazil has also reported its first case of COVID-19.

“CARPHA has therefore identified that with the rapid spread of the virus from China to 38 other countries, member states must be vigilant to detect any imported cases and be prepared to manage any subsequent local transmission.”

St. John said “we stand ready to provide support and guidance to member states on how to strengthen their health systems response should there be importation and any subsequent person-to-person transmission in the Caribbean.

“We are currently working with regional partners to develop a CARICOM Regional Plan to manage the COVID-19 outbreak.”

CARPHA said it is urging the public to practice simple everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses.

“It is recommended that persons maintain basic hand and respiratory hygiene, and avoid close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing,” CARPHA said, listing other measures to be adopted.