


MEMORANDUM

TO: Kathleen E. Toomey, MD, MPH 
Commissioner
Georgia Department of Public Health

THROUGH: Kristin Miller
General Counsel
Georgia Department of Public Health

FROM: Cherie L. Drenzek, DVM, MS
State Epidemiologist

DATE: March 6, 2020

SUBJECT: Proposal to add novel respiratory virus infections to the Georgia Notifiable Disease List

Novel respiratory virus infections pose a risk to local and global health as individuals have not yet developed an immune response to fight illness. To ensure rapid detection and mitigation of these diseases, we propose that the following condition be added to the list of diseases that are **immediately** notifiable in Georgia:

- a. **All novel respiratory viruses**; for example: *COVID-19, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)*, etc.

Further, as these diseases are emerging and new commercial tests are being developed, confirmation testing at a public health laboratory may be required. Additionally, our definition also includes requiring immediate notification of any positives as contact tracing should begin immediately to further mitigate disease spread.

COVID-19 is an emerging respiratory virus that has become a global public health concern. Currently the spread of illness is rapid and has the potential to cause severe illness in the elderly and with those with comorbidities. It is of upmost importance to identify individual cases quickly to prevent spread.

Making *all novel respiratory viruses*, including *COVID-19*, immediately reportable will permit DPH to: 1) promptly identify cases of *novel respiratory viruses* to isolate them and mitigate spread of disease; 2) monitor novel respiratory virus infection rates at the state and facility level to estimate burden of disease; and, 3) collect data about complications, extended hospital stays, and deaths due to novel respiratory viruses.