

# The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

## Hundreds exposed to D.C. church rector with coronavirus urged to self-quarantine

By **Fenit Nirappil** and **Darran Simon**

March 9, 2020 at 3:26 p.m. GMT+1

*This is a developing story. It will be updated.*

D.C. officials on Monday urged hundreds who attended Christ Church Georgetown on several recent days to self-quarantine because of their exposure to the Rev. Timothy Cole, the church rector who is the first known coronavirus patient in the District.

Cole tested positive for coronavirus Saturday and is hospitalized at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in stable condition.

Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) announced the self-quarantine recommendation at a news conference as local authorities try to contain the spread of the virus. It is the first broad self-quarantine order in the Washington region.

Bowser also said she is evaluating if she needs the power to impose quarantines by declaring a public health emergency. She said a decision is likely later today.

AD

Anjali Talwalkar, senior deputy director for the community health administration at the D.C. Health Department, said there is “medium risk” for people who came within six feet of Cole on Feb. 24 and between Feb. 28 and March 3. Officials are recommending that those people self-quarantine for 14 days since the last time they were at the church.

“That is when our case was symptomatic, so anybody who was potentially exposed during that time, out of caution and best practices for disease control, that’s the recommendation,” Talwalkar said.

Cole oversaw services attended by 550 people on March 1, shook parishioners’ hands and provided Communion at the 11:15 services. Church officials said he appeared healthy that day and had been regularly washing his hands. But he had been ill in late February.

AD

There was no immediate estimate of how many people came into close contact with him on the other targeted days.

The historic Episcopal church closed Sunday while the D.C. Health department launched an investigation into exposures. The agency notified the church at 10:47 p.m. Sunday that parishioners should self-quarantine, and the church sent an email to members an hour later.

Cole and his family are already under quarantine. A spokeswoman for the Georgetown hospital says he is isolated and staff are using personal protective equipment.

Cole had no recent international travel and first fell ill after returning from a Feb. 22 conference of Episcopal leaders in Louisville, Ky. Conference organizers say they are in touch with the CDC and public health authorities in the District and Kentucky.

AD

The District's second coronavirus case involved a man who was treated in Maryland, but developed symptoms in the city after traveling there from Nigeria.

School Without Walls, a selective public high school in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood, closed Monday after city officials determined that a staff member had close contact with that patient.

But officials said Monday that all three people who had close contact with the patient had tested negative for the virus.

Bowser said the school was being deep cleaned and would reopen Tuesday. "Even though our employee does not display any symptoms, I made a decision to [close the school] out of an abundance of caution," Bowser said.

AD

D.C. International School, a charter school in Northwest D.C., also closed Monday after officials said a staff member may have been exposed to the virus.

Bowser said she is exploring whether a public emergency declaration is warranted. That declaration would give the mayor the authority to impose quarantines. In the meantime, she said, people should take the self-quarantine message seriously.

"We don't see it as a 'nice to', it's a 'must to,'" Bowser said. "If you've been exposed, you need to self quarantine, and we recognize that there will be hardships for many people not just in D.C., but in Maryland and Virginia. We know there were congregants not just from Washington, D.C. who attend Christ Church."

AD

Maryland officials have confirmed five coronavirus cases, while Virginia has reported two.

Authorities believe all the Virginia and Maryland patients contracted the virus while overseas. Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan has scheduled a 3:30 p.m. news conference to provide more information about the latest cases, both of which involve senior citizens who had limited interactions with the public since returning from abroad.

A person who attended the Conservative Political Action Conference at the National Harbor resort in Oxon Hill, Md., also has been diagnosed with the virus, and at least two members of Congress announced Sunday that they would self-quarantine because they had contact with him.

AD

On Monday, Del. Matt Morgan (R-St. Mary's) said in a statement that 12 members of the House Republican Caucus went to the conference to hear an address by President Trump. The infected person did not attend that part of the conference, the statement said.

"At this time, it is improbable that any member of the Maryland House Republican Caucus came within direct contact of the infected individual," Morgan said. "However, our Caucus members will defer to guidance provided by the Maryland Department of Health."

Since the coronavirus outbreak began in the Wuhan province of China, the virus has infected more than 109,000 people globally and has killed more than 3,700. Italy launched a plan Sunday to restrict the movement of 16 million people across northern regions of the country after a surge in cases.

AD

Confirmed cases in the United States topped 500 Sunday, with fatalities rising to 21 after the deaths of two more residents of an infection-stricken nursing home in Washington state.

To curb the spread of the virus, authorities are urging people to regularly wash their hands, avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay home when ill. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, patients are thought to be the most contagious when they are the most symptomatic, but some spread may be possible before people are visibly sick.

*Ovetta Wiggins contributed to this report.*

## Coronavirus: What you need to read

---

Updated March 9, 2020

**Live updates: The latest in the coronavirus crisis.**

**Sign up for our Coronavirus Updates newsletter:** All stories linked the newsletter are free to access.

**What you need to know about coronavirus:** What is it? How deadly is it? How does it spread?

**Mapping the spread of the coronavirus in the U.S. and worldwide.**

**How to prepare for coronavirus in the United States.** (Step 1: Don't panic.)

**Are you a health-care worker fighting coronavirus** on the front lines? Share your experience with The Post.

Follow all of our **coronavirus coverage**.



