



WHEELING FIRE DEPARTMENT

2126 Market Street • Wheeling, WV 26003

Larry Helms, Chief of Department



A Message from Wheeling Fire Department Chief Larry Helms

Note: Chief Helms will be delivering periodic messages to the public to provide updates from the Wheeling Fire Department during the COVID-19 epidemic.

WHEELING, W.Va. — The world is facing a relatively unknown enemy, the coronavirus, and as your first-line emergency services providers, the Wheeling Fire Department wants you to know how important it is that we all work together during this stressful time.

The Wheeling Fire Department always has two priorities — protecting our community and also protecting our brave firefighters. To do that during this health care crisis, we are asking the public we serve to do a few things:

Please pay attention to and abide by recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and other recognized public health leaders with regard to your personal hygiene, such as washing your hands thoroughly, cleaning your home more frequently, practicing social distancing, etc. These are not mere suggestions. These simple steps can make a dramatic difference in limiting the spread of this virus.

Regarding Gov. Jim Justice's "stay at home" order — this is not to be taken lightly. We absolutely must adhere to this for now, and that means seriously limiting your trips to places where many people may gather, such as the grocery store. Be judicious when running errands. If you have family members, friends or neighbors who need supplies or groceries, limit your contact with them while still providing assistance. While outdoor activity is still permitted, please practice social distancing to the greatest extent possible.

What happens if you feel sick? I ask everyone to do his/her best to remain calm and do a thorough self-assessment if you feel ill. Do your symptoms feel the same as other times when you have had a cold or the flu or allergies?

If your symptoms are familiar to you because of previous illness, allergies or other known health conditions, then your best recourse is to speak with your physician, stay in your home and segregate yourself inside your home from the rest of your family. Follow your doctor's direction. If you do not have a physician and are worried your symptoms could be related to COVID-19, please call the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources hotline at 1-800-887-4304 or visit www.coronavirus.wv.gov for updates.

In our experience, most people generally ride out flu symptoms at home, and this is no different unless you develop severe symptoms, i.e. severe shortness breath, chest pains and a sustained elevated body temp above 100.4 Fahrenheit. Remember what your typical underlying health condition/status is, and then measure that against your current symptoms.

Given all that, we are still here for you. If you feel the need to call 9-1-1 and request an ambulance, we want you to know that we are making a few changes to our procedures to protect our firefighters in accordance with state and federal emergency medical services guidelines.

While waiting for the ambulance to arrive, it would be helpful if you can move yourself to an outside, open-air situation. This will make it easier for our personnel to assess you without exposure to your living environment or other people.

If you already have a mask, please put it on. Otherwise, you can expect that we will place a mask on you during our initial assessment. We also likely will have only one EMS provider treat you during your initial assessment and transport.

One final recommendation I'd like everyone to consider is how important it is to manage your expectations of government officials during this time. Information from scientists and health care experts is changing constantly, so any predictions about the duration of this situation should be taken with a grain of salt. I realize we all want life to return to normal so we can celebrate holidays and other life events, but we cannot put those hopes above what is necessary to contain and overcome this viral threat.

We all have a role to play in facing this unseen enemy, and the Wheeling Fire Department remains committed to protecting you during this time. With your help and cooperation, we can remain strong, safe and united as a community.