Personnel say UL currently safe from Coronavirus, discuss disease's spread

Amelia Jennings
NEWS WRITER

Coronavirus is a new mutation of a virus that causes respiratory infections and is known as 2019-nCov. Coronavirus first began in Wuhan, China and spreads via human contact.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website on coronavirus, "Respiratory illness caused by 2019-nCov in Wuhan, China had some link to a large seafood and live animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. Later, a growing number of patients reportedly did not have exposure to animal markets, indicating person-to-person spread."

Ritwik Kulkarni, Ph.D., is an immunologist and a professor in the biology department at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

"This is a new human virus," Kulkarni said. "Symptoms range from no symptoms or really mild symptoms to serious to where some people die from it."

He also said that there is no cure for the disease.

"For viruses we have antivirals, but for this one, we don't. That's what makes it so dangerous," Kulkarni said.

However, he believes it's not a deadly virus.

"We know other viruses from this same group of viruses, like those that caused the flu epidemic in 2002-2003, and the SARS virus. I think that their mortality rate was 10%," Kulkarni said. "Here, the mortality rate (for coronavirus), at least now, is 3% to 4%. So it's not exactly deadly-deadly."

UL Lafayette sent out an email stating that students at the university are not at risk of getting coronavirus as of now.

"There are no reported cases in Louisiana. There are no reported cases at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. No cases are under investigation in Louisiana," reads the statement.

The report also stated that the University will keep students up to date and is trying to keep the campus free of the disease.

"UL Lafayette, in collaboration with the Louisiana Office of Public Health, is monitoring the situation to ensure the health and safety of the University community. The University will provide updates as needed," according to the statement.

The statement concluded with ways that students can protect themselves, such as not coughing into their hands and washing their hands regularly.

According to the statement, "To protect yourself and others, members of the campus community: should cover their mouths or noses with a tissue or their shirtsleeves — not their hands — when coughing or sneezing, should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (and) use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available."

In spite of all of this information, the CDC is concerned that it is a public health risk.

"This is a very serious public health threat. The fact that this virus has caused severe illness and sustained person-to-person spread in China is concerning, but it's unclear how the situation in the United States will unfold at this time," reads the CDC website.

The CDC states that it will continue to spread and people should be vaccinated and take antivirals.

"It's also likely that person-to-person spread will continue to occur, including in the United States," states the website. "It's currently flu and respiratory disease season and CDC recommends getting vaccinated, taking everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs, and taking flu antivirals if prescribed."

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