COVID-19: Exposure
By Dr. Michele Dikkers, Chair of Clayton County Board of Health

I was never a Boy Scout but have learned that the best chance at being successful in most things is to be prepared. Don’t leave home without using the bathroom and checking the gas gauge in the car. In medical training there is an old saying reminding one to be prepared, “If you see a bathroom, use it. A bed, sleep in it. If you see food, eat it.” For you may find yourself in a situation where it may be a while before you are able to do any of those things.

This past week we have been watching the number of COVID-19 cases across the country climb. The numbers have been creeping up in Iowa as well. As time goes on, more and more people will be infected with COVID-19 and it is likely that we will each be exposed to someone with the illness at some time.

What should we do if we are exposed to someone that has COVID-19? What happens if we get a call telling us that we have been exposed to someone that came down with COVID-19 after we had been visiting with them? Remember, someone may be contagious for up to 48 hours prior to having symptoms and knowing or suspecting they have the virus.

Per guidance from the CDC, if you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and are feeling well, you should stay home until 14 days after your last exposure. You should check your temperature twice a day and monitor for symptoms. You should contact your primary care provider and discuss testing options. If you become ill, you should also contact your provider. If you become short of breath, you may need to go to the emergency room for evaluation. Remember to call ahead.

If you receive a call from the Public Health Department to inform you that you have been exposed, they will direct you as to what to do next. This will likely consist of where and how to have testing done. It will also consist of quarantining for a period of time, possibly up to 14 days.

As a reminder, if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have symptoms or are awaiting test results, you will also need to isolate yourself. You should contact your health care provider to determine when you may discontinue quarantining or isolating yourself.

So, as you expose yourself to more people, remain prepared—wear your mask, wash your hands and maintain physical distancing. If you find that you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, don’t panic, call your provider for guidance, directions for testing and be prepared to be quarantined.

Stay safe and be well. Remember, we are in this together.