



## Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

What families need to know about the virus and about school

March 3, 2020

Dear Parent or Guardian,

A number of parents have called with questions about our response to the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19). While the virus has been identified on the west side of our state, there still have not been any confirmed cases in Eastern Washington. It's true that 5 individuals testing positive for the virus are being treated at Sacred Heart Medical Center, but these individuals were transferred to Sacred Heart from outside our region. Sacred Heart was selected because of its secured airborne infection isolation rooms, a specialized unit within the hospital; Sacred Heart is one of just 10 hospitals in the country with this specialized treatment center.

***With this in mind, other than in situations where your child is sick, we are not recommending that you keep your children home from school. We remain in close contact with public health officials, and at this time, none of our regional health departments are recommending that schools be closed or that special precautions (i.e. - face masks) be put in place.***

Anything with 24/7 news coverage gets our attention. But often, the barrage of information makes issues seem more threatening than might be warranted in the moment. At this point, such is the case with the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19). Behind the scenes, district administrators continue to work through forward-thinking scenarios that involve diagnosed cases in our area, but for the time being, we need to focus on what makes sense for today.

- First, ***source your news carefully***. Keep in mind that social media streams and news outlets often sensationalize and hypothesize. This style of reporting keeps people tuned in, but we know dramatizing often increases anxiety for many, which is counterproductive in situations where thoughtful and calm responses are needed.

Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides the best source of factual and medically accurate information. The CDC provides continual updates on their website. For those of you using Facebook and Twitter, the CDC posts updates to those platforms as well. Additionally, Washington State's Dept. of Health has COVID-19 resources available and is closely monitoring the situation in our state. As it relates to our local reality, district administrators and nurses work closely with medical professionals at Spokane Regional Health.

- Next, as is always important (and especially so during flu season), ***please help us emphasize basic hygiene routines***. Regular hand washing, coughing or sneezing into an elbow, and avoiding unnecessary touching of the eyes, nose, and mouth are practices that provide the best prevention for all of us. In conjunction with emphasis on basic hygiene, school custodians are being asked to place additional emphasis on cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces in our buildings.

- Finally, ***students and adults alike are being asked to stay home when sick***. It's often hard to miss work and school, but doing so benefits the entire community as it helps stop the spread of any flu or virus. Going forward, the CDC *does* expect to see some level of "community spread" as it pertains to COVID-19, where the virus moves quite rapidly throughout communities with infected individuals. When sick people avoid public interactions, especially in crowded spaces (such as in schools) the spread of a virus can be slowed significantly.

Please take a moment to talk with your children. Interestingly, children seem to be the least at risk. Epidemiologists (medical professionals who deal with the incidence, distribution, and possible control of diseases) note that *children are contracting the virus at far lesser rates than adults*. These scientists are working to understand why this is the case, but one possibility is that the innate immune response tends to be more active in children.

Often, children don't talk about their fears. They figure if we don't bring it up, we think they should be able to handle it on their own. Making kids experts is a wonderful way to open conversation. Try something like this: "I've been hearing on the news that a lot of kids are worried about the coronavirus. Are kids at your school talking about it?" By using this approach, children don't have to own or deny their fears. It feels much less vulnerable to speak about others, but we can know that everything they say is framed by their own take on this.

Reassure your child(ren) that there are helpers everywhere working to keep us safe and healthy. NPR produced a great comic just for kids that explores all things related to the COVID-19 virus, from what it is, what it looks like, to tips to stay healthy; access it using this URL - <http://bit.ly/inforkids>

It always feels disconcerting when the unknowns are high, and with this novel virus there's much unknown. The science is evolving rapidly - daily - as experts prepare to protect us by the best possible means. Remember that right now, even as you read this, our government and medical professionals are working behind the scenes to ready our health care facilities for the best possible response as this unfolds. We'll stay in close communication with you and work diligently to ensure the safety of our students, staff, and community.

Sincerely,



Travis W. Hanson  
Superintendent