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Information on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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Date: February 27, 2020
To: Superintendents and Principals
From: Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education and Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction
RE: Information on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is aware that school communities are concerned about the outbreak of novel coronavirus in China and have questions about how that may affect schools in Oregon. This memo was developed in partnership with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and is designed to provide information and resources to support the health and well-being of students, staff, and communities.

Key recommendations in this memo include:

- Deferring to [public health authorities](#) to determine whether students should stay home if they suspect COVID-19.
- Preventing stigma and discrimination by using only the guidance described by your [local and state public health authorities](#).
- Routinely cleaning all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs.
- Emphasizing the importance of staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all students.

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel (new) COVID-19 that was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China and which, as of February 26, has been detected in 37 locations internationally, including the United States. The virus has been named "SARS-CoV-2" and the disease it causes has been named "Coronavirus disease 2019" (abbreviated "COVID-19"). It is important to note that there are many types of coronaviruses that look similar to the common cold. Not everyone diagnosed with a coronavirus has COVID-19. COVID-19 is new, which means health officials are still learning about the disease, its transmission and effects. Officials do know that COVID-19 can cause severe respiratory illness. This memo specifically addresses COVID-19.

On January 30, 2020, the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern". On January 31, 2020, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II declared a public health emergency for the United States to aid the nation's healthcare community in responding to COVID-19.

Situation in Oregon

There have been zero confirmed cases to date in Oregon, although you may have read that a number of people in Oregon are being monitored for the disease. These are individuals who do not have COVID-19 symptoms such as fever, cough or difficulty breathing, but who may have been exposed through a close contact with a confirmed case or travel to mainland China. The only people in the state who have had symptoms that rose to the level of being under investigation have been cleared, as their test results were negative. There is currently low risk for the American public of contracting COVID-19. The Oregon Health Authority is closely monitoring the outbreak. Please visit [OHA's COVID-19 webpage](#) for up-to-date information. For general information on COVID-19, call 211.

Situation in U.S.

Imported cases of COVID-19 in travelers have been detected in the U.S. Person-to-person spread of COVID-19 also has been seen among close contacts of returned travelers from Wuhan, but at this time, this virus is NOT currently spreading in the community in the United States.

How to support students*What to do when students are sick and preventative measures*

- Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all students. Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.
- School nurses, principals, and other school staff should review [OHA and ODE's Communicable Disease Guidelines](#) to understand appropriate protocols for prevention and potential exclusion.
- If a student has a confirmed case of COVID-19, the school should consider how best to inform the school community of potential exposure in a way that does not breach confidentiality or result in stigma or discrimination. Please work with your [local public health department](#) to respond appropriately.

Perform routine environmental cleaning

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the school, such as student desks, countertops, and doorknobs.

Review your pandemic influenza and outbreak plans

- The Oregon Health Authority encourages communities, schools and businesses to review existing plans and make sure they are up-to-date. If you do not have a plan, now is the time to develop one. All outbreaks are reportable, including those that occur in work, school or camp settings. The Oregon Health Authority has a toolkit to support schools in [outbreak detection and management](#).

Supporting students unable to attend school

- All education stakeholders should consider the effects of significant absences on student achievement and establish plans that not only ensure health and safety, but also maintain continuity of learning to the degree possible.
- Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, if a student is required or advised to stay home by public health authorities because they are regarded as having, or potentially having, COVID-19, the school district must maintain continuity of learning by providing educational services to that student.
- School officials should defer to [public health authorities](#) to determine whether students should stay home if they suspect COVID-19. If school officials themselves require or advise students to stay home for demonstrating symptoms, according to [ODE and OHA's Communicable Disease Guidance](#), the school district likewise must maintain continuity of learning. Schools should think creatively about how to sustain student learning and achievement during prolonged absences and how to provide needed additional academic supports upon the student's return. If a student with a preexisting disability is required or advised to stay home by public health authorities, the school must ensure that the student continues to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and may need to convene the student's individualized education program (IEP) or 504 team to determine how to do so.

Preventing stigma and discrimination

- School officials should defer to the [CDC guidance for risk assessment](#) and [local](#) and state public health authorities to determine risk of COVID-19 infection. To prevent stigma and discrimination, use only the guidance described by your [local and state public health authorities](#). Do not make determinations of risk based on race, ethnicity, or country of origin, and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19 infection. Schools should also plan to support students who return from travel to affected areas, particularly if they have experienced quarantine.

Bullying and harassment

- School officials should be mindful that bullying of students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability can be considered race- or disability-based harassment that violates federal civil rights laws. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 require that every school district or school that receives federal funds take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred when responding to reports of bullying and harassment of students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability.

Students and travel

- Public health authorities are currently conducting health evaluations for all travelers returning to the US from China, and have been monitoring since February 3rd. Students who have returned from China within the last 14 days, have been exposed to COVID-19, and/or have symptoms should be in contact with their [local health department](#) and their health care provider.
- Schools should not plan any field trips or other travel-related activities to China or South Korea. Currently, the CDC recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China and South Korea (Warning Level 3) and that some vulnerable populations (including older people and those with chronic health conditions) should reconsider travel to Iran, Italy, and Japan (Alert Level 2).

How to support staff*Actively encourage sick employees to stay home*

- Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick. Please review [ODE and OHA's Communicable Disease Guidance](#).

Separate sick employees

- CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees. Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

Perform routine environmental cleaning

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the school, such as student desks, countertops, and doorknobs.

Responding to employees who have been exposed or who are sick

- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for how to conduct a [risk assessment of their potential exposure](#) and contact their [local public health department](#).
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 infection should refer to [CDC guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment](#) and contact [their local public health department](#).

Public Health Recommendations and Resources

For complete recommendations, visit the [CDC website](#) and [OHA's website](#).

While the immediate risk of this new virus to the American public is believed to be low at this time, everyone can do their part to help be prepared for this emerging public health threat:

- It's currently flu and respiratory disease season. Many of the everyday precautions we take to prevent flu are useful in protecting against the spread of COVID-19.
 - Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched.
- Additionally, build your body's overall health resilience by eating well, exercising, getting plenty of rest, and staying up to date on vaccines. CDC recommends getting a flu vaccine each year and it is not too late to be vaccinated.
- CDC has issued travel warnings for several countries. Individuals planning to travel outside of the US should check CDC's website prior to travel and follow any recommendations provided.
- People who have traveled to affected areas, have been exposed, or have symptoms should call their [local health department](#) and their health care provider to decide if

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they need to be seen. If so, they can create a plan to enter a clinic in a way that avoids being around others. Please follow instructions during this time from your [local public health authority](#).

Who to contact if you have questions or concerns

After reading this memo, you may still have questions or concerns. Work with your [local health department](#), which will have information and resources to help you.

Resources:

1. [OHA Information on COVID-19](#)
2. [OHA Guidance on Preventing COVID-19](#)
3. [Local Public Health Authority Directory](#)
4. [CDC Updates and Information](#)
5. [School District Planning for Pandemic Influenza Planning](#)
6. [Guidance for Schools and Daycare Centers on Outbreak Detection and Management](#)
7. [SAMHSA Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
8. [CDC Helping Children Cope with Disasters](#)
9. [ODE and OHA's Communicable Disease Guidance](#)

This information has been adapted from the Oregon Health Authority, The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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