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Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Over the last few weeks, we have been monitoring both the traditional cold and flu season as well as the new coronavirus (2019 Novel Coronavirus -- 2019-nCoV). This new virus is of concern to many of our families and to us as well; therefore, we ask that you join in partnering to provide the safest and healthiest environment for students, families, faculty, and staff on your campuses.

The disease, which originated in China last month, has claimed more than 2,600 lives and affected more than 77,000 people worldwide. Fourteen people in the U.S., plus 40 passengers on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, have confirmed cases of the illness, for which typical symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath, according to the CDC. In the last week, people in Italy, South Korea and Iran have died from the virus.

Tuesday's (2/25) warning from the CDC marks an abrupt shift in tone from the agency, which has largely remained circumspect about the threat level for the U.S. The risk assessment on the CDC website still says the "immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low" for the average American, though it warns that a global "pandemic" declaration could shift the forecast.

The [Center of Disease Control and Prevention](#) has released the following illness prevention strategies, which should be closely followed.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Additionally, the CDC shares these key points as well:

- CDC guidance indicates that people who have casual contact with a case (in the same grocery store or movie theater) are at minimal risk of developing infection.
- If you have **not** been to Wuhan, China, or been in close contact with someone who has been to Wuhan and is sick, your risk is very low.

- If you have recently been to Wuhan, China, and feel sick, please stay home and avoid contact with others, except for seeking medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.

So, What Should You Do?

What should I do about coronavirus? Inevitably, this question will come up soon at your school if it hasn't already. The best way to assuage parents' fears and protect your campus is to have a written plan, should coronavirus infect your community. The press is suggesting parents check for plans with their schools, so you will likely be asked.

Your campus' plan should address at least these questions:

- What ongoing steps should we use to help prevent the spread of all diseases— flu, coronavirus, or otherwise?
- Do we know if any of our families have recently traveled in China or have visiting relatives and/or friends currently in their home from China?
- What are the steps to follow if coronavirus starts to spread in your geographical area?
- What to do if there is a first confirmed case of coronavirus at your school?

Below is a list of questions to answer as you work out the details of your plan of action:

- At what threshold would you suspend a class, or school, and for how long?
- What steps should be taken to keep surfaces and hands clean if the risk is mild (i.e., it's in your area)?
- What symptoms will you ask parents to look for?
- Do you want to modify or more strongly enforce your "no school attendance within 24 hours of having a fever"?
- How will you refer students to be tested if you have concerns?
- If you have a confirmed case of coronavirus at your school will you close? For how long?
- Do you notify parents of students that are in the same class as the sick student? (Check on local health disclosure laws.)

It is also EXTREMELY important to follow standard environmental infection control procedures. Discuss these as a staff and require that teachers go over these procedures and practice them with their classes.

- o Washing hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- o Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not on hand.
- o Covering the nose and mouth with elbow or a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- o Avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- o Limiting close contact with people who are sick.

It is also best practice to require that parents keep sick children home from school until they're fever-free for at least 24 hours without medication.

If you are aware that you have families who have recently traveled in China, the CDC is requesting that healthy travelers who have recently been to China voluntarily self-quarantine for 14 days. If you have a student or family who has traveled to China and is self-quarantining, then they should be excused for those 14 days.

If you or someone you know has traveled to China and feels sick, please:

- Stay home and avoid contact with others, except for seeking medical care.
- Seek medical care right away. Again, before seeking care, call ahead to report recent travel and symptoms.
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands frequently.

As a school what should you be doing should this virus create more of a threat and school dismissals or closures become required?

While the immediate health risk is low for the average American, a global “pandemic” declaration could shift this forecast. If that shift does occur, one option schools can take is to utilize e-learning. Technology does allow for students to stay home and still complete work online. The key, though, to successful e-learning is to prepare students and teachers prior to the emergency need. If you can run the kids through some online practice while they are at school, the implementation at home will go much better. Making online learning similar to what they do in their classroom is best practice. Getting your students used to going to a student management system to submit assignments online will help students to see that it’s not a completely different experience.

It is also important to establish a process for determining whether students are contracting the virus and a system for reporting updates to health officials.

Finally, communication to your families is of utmost importance so they know you are aware and have a plan! Here is a sample letter to families that you may want to personalize.

Dear Families,

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

As you are likely aware, on Tuesday, February 25th, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) gave a press conference updating the country on the current status of the coronavirus (COVID-19), and what steps should be taken moving forward. We wanted to share with you some of the steps our school is taking to prevent the spread of illness across our campus, and plan for the possible spread of the coronavirus in our community.

As the CDC emphasized, there is ***not currently a coronavirus pandemic in the United States***. A pandemic occurs when a disease is spreading from a variety of sources across a large region,

and the number of cases across the US is still small. However, given how quickly the global situation is evolving, we are monitoring new developments and will continue to reevaluate our steps and actions daily.

In the meantime, the most effective way to stay healthy and minimize the spread of infectious disease is to follow basic health best practices:

- Enforcing great hygiene, such as washing hands thoroughly and covering up coughs/sneezes.
- Asking all faculty, staff, and students who are feeling ill to stay home until they recover.

Good hygiene and handwashing, healthy eating, and avoidance of large crowds/unhealthy places are key to staying healthy – for this and any virus.

Our community is prepared to alter our procedures and planning should the situation change [including strategies like virtual schooling]. We are also thinking ahead regarding the impact spring travel, upcoming school trips, and other non-typical school activities will have in the context of the coronavirus. We will communicate any changes when the time is appropriate.

It is important to remember that handling the spread of a serious contagion like the coronavirus is primarily a task for public health agencies. Any directives from the World Health Organization, CDC, or local governmental organizations should be followed.

In times like this, we are particularly grateful for the strength and togetherness of this community. Please continue to look for further communications from us on this matter.

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. Psalm 91:1-3

Sincerely,
<Your Name>

As always, we are here to support you and your ministry. If we can be of further assistance or if you have additional questions, please reach out to us.

God's richest blessings to you as you seek Him and honor Him on your campuses.



Rev. Mike Gibson
PSD, District President



Rachel Klitzing
PSD, Executive Director of School Ministries