

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As coverage of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in China and throughout the world, including the U.S., has become more prevalent, our school system and the Tuscarawas County Health Department are fielding an increasing number of questions from anxious parents and residents. Please know that, as we do in all health-related cases, we are working closely together and receiving additional guidance from the Tuscarawas County Health Department, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

It is also important to understand that as of this writing, **we have 3 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ohio.** This is a rapidly evolving situation, and one which we are monitoring closely. Schools in Tuscarawas County have previously developed emergency operations plans that specifically address how to deal with a large-scale respiratory illness outbreak, including procedures for excluding ill students and staff, cancellation of activities and mass gatherings, and, if necessary, school closure. We regularly work with our local health departments when there is a case or outbreak of disease for guidance on recommendation of student(s) exclusion and/or school closure.

There are 4 coronaviruses that normally circulate in human populations and cause mild respiratory illness, along with 3 coronaviruses originating in animal populations that cause more severe disease (SARS, MERS, and COVID-19). The 2019 novel strain causing the current outbreak is a new one and has a more severe impact in terms of respiratory illness; initial symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. The CDC is still studying how the virus is transmitted, though at this point it is believed to spread via respiratory droplets (like the flu). Children, adolescents, and healthy adults are not considered to be at increased risk for severe illness of COVID 19; older adults and those with underlying medical conditions are more likely to require hospitalization.

Practicing good hygiene can help to limit the spread of viruses in our schools. The virus may persist on surfaces such as desks and doorknobs so as a safeguard, custodial staff will continue to regularly clean and disinfect classrooms and common areas.

The current recommended precautions to avoid exposure to the virus are the same precautions you would take to avoid the flu. To keep your family safe:

- *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 and do not return to work or school until you have been fever-free without the use of fever reducing medication for at least 24 hours.***
- *Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash; if tissues aren't available, cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.*

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. However, to prevent influenza and possible unnecessary evaluation for COVID-19, all persons over the age of 6 months should receive an annual influenza vaccine; vaccination is still available and effective in helping to prevent influenza.

We will be continuing our partnerships with public health experts and updating you when new relevant information is available. You may find additional information here:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>

Ohio Department of Health:

<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/Novel-Coronavirus/Resources-for-the-Public/>

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.

Sincerely,

Katie Seward, MPH, CHES, CTTS
Health Commissioner
Tuscarawas County Health Department

Cindy Brown
Superintendent
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