



HEALTH ADVISORY FOR SCHOOLS REGARDING COVID-19

March 17, 2020

PUBLIC HEALTH REGION 8

Overview

Virus Information

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in humans and many different species of animals. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people,
- This is a new strain, hence the word novel, thought to have spread from animals to humans in a large meat/seafood market in China
- The term being used for the disease caused by this new virus is COVID-19

Transmission

- The virus spreads person to person via respiratory droplets produced when someone coughs or sneezes
- Can occur between people in close contact or within approx. 6 ft

Clinical Picture

- People infected with this new coronavirus may have no symptoms, mild to moderate symptoms or be severely ill requiring hospitalization. In some cases, the disease can be fatal.
- The most frequently reported signs and symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
- Severe illness is more common in older adults and people with underlying chronic medical conditions such as lung or heart disease or diseases that compromise the immune system
- Children are not one of the vulnerable groups to this coronavirus
- Disease in children is most commonly mild.

Response

- Current case counts, as of noon today (3/17/20), are:
 - US: 4226 confirmed cases; 75 deaths; in 53 states and territories
 - Texas: 57 cases in 17 counties and 1 death
- the U.S. government suspended entry of foreign nationals who have been in the following countries or areas in the past 14 days:
 - China
 - Europe
 - Iran

- South Korea
- U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents and their immediate family members who have traveled to these areas in the last 14 days are being funneled through 11 US airports to be screened.
- Once they return home, public health is following up to institute for home quarantine
- Public Health is also consulting with healthcare providers on patients with symptoms and testing those who are suspected of having COVID19
- In Public Health Region 8, we have 4 cases in Bexar county and one case in Lavaca County. All of the cases so far are travel related.
- We currently do not have evidence of community spread.

School Information

- The CDC has issued Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Childcare Programs on their website
- This guidance includes a decision tree for schools to use.
- The guidance is divided into categories for: no community spread; minimal to moderate spread; and substantial community spread.
- The most important thing to do now is **plan and prepare**
 - **Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans.**
 - **Require sick students and staff to stay home.**
 - Establish procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible.
 - **Teach and reinforce healthy hygiene practices.**
 - Ensure proper handwashing which involves washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol
 - **Intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts.**
 - Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched.
 - Clean with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label
 - Provide EPA-registered disposable wipes to teachers and staff so that commonly used surfaces (e.g.,



keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down before use.

- **Monitor and plan for absenteeism**
- **Cancel gatherings and events outside of the classroom**
- Currently there is not evidence of community spread in Public Health Region 8, but as I said, several cases remain under investigation in Bexar County. Therefore, it's important to review the CDC guidelines for minimal to moderate community spread.
 - **Implement multiple social distancing strategies**
 - **Cancel or modify classes where students are likely to be in very close contact.**
 - **Avoid mixing students in common areas**
 - **Limit nonessential visitors.**
 - **Teach staff, students, and their families to maintain distance from each other in the school**

Additional information is available at www.DSHS.Texas.Gov/coronavirus
Or www.CDC.gov/coronavirus.

If you have questions for Region 8, please call 210-949-2000. We will return your call as soon as possible. You may also send an email to Region8.epi@dshs.texas.gov.