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DPS: 2020-39

MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents, Administrators,
and Educators

FROM: Chancellor Jacob Oliva

DATE: March 3, 2020

SUBJECT: Florida Preparedness for COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Two cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) were recently confirmed in Florida, leading to Governor Ron DeSantis and State Surgeon General Scott Rivkees declaring a public health emergency ([Executive Order 20-51](#)). **Currently, there is still a low risk in Florida. Planning and preparing is always important, and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) understands that concerns about health and safety are paramount for all education communities.** Schools, school districts, colleges and universities are encouraged to [contact their local health department for the most up-to-date information and assistance](#) regarding COVID-19. County health departments are fully integrated with the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and are well equipped to respond if necessary. The CDC has also published [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to COVID-19](#).

COVID-19 is spread similarly to the flu, mostly through contact from an infected individual and transmitted by coughing and sneezing. Common symptoms include fever, coughing, shortness of breath, and lower and upper respiratory issues. It is more likely to occur in the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, and most individuals with the virus will have a mild case and will be able to be treated at home.

As COVID-19 evolves, the most important thing for schools to do is **plan and prepare:**

- Review, update and implement emergency operations plans. This should be done in collaboration with local health departments.
- Ensure handwashing strategies include **washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.**
- Develop information-sharing systems with parents and local partners.
- **Perform routine cleaning**, including frequently touched surfaces.

The Florida Department of Health is able to test for COVID-19 in labs in Jacksonville, Miami and Tampa, allowing tests results to be available within 24 to 48 hours. If you come into contact with an individual who has recently traveled to an area that the [CDC has issued a level 2 or level 3 travel health notice](#) such as China, Italy, South Korea and Japan, there are protocols in place:

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- **Immediately contact your local county health department upon developing symptoms, before visiting a doctor.**
- Individuals will be evaluated at any local hospital. **ANY** local hospital is equipped to handle COVID-19. Testing will be conducted in Jacksonville, Miami or Tampa.
- The goal is **containment** to stop any transmission.

It is currently flu season, and we encourage you to continue to stress these common guidelines with all members of the school community, students, staff, and parents:

- Get a flu shot, and take flu antivirals if prescribed.
- If you are sick, stay home.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Carry and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Immediately dispose of used tissue.
- Monitor your symptoms.

Lastly, an emerging trend nationally is for educational institutions to take additional precautions regarding students, staff and administrators who may be returning from overseas travel to China, Iran, Italy, South Korea and Japan. Florida's state universities and colleges are now requiring those students to self-isolate for 14 days, before returning to campus, as well as cancelling university- and college-sponsored travel to these countries. Our team at the Florida Department of Education would be happy to discuss strategies with you around implementing similar best practices, in order to reduce the risks to your students.

Helpful information can be found at the following websites:

- Florida Department of Health: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- Florida Department of Education: <http://fldoe.org/em-response/>
- Please see this [helpful flier](#) from the CDC related to handwashing and hand sanitizer.
- Please see this [helpful flier](#) from the CDC related to stopping the spread of germs.

Florida is doing everything in their power to prepare and respond to COVID-19 and the Florida Department of Education is available to assist as needed. Daily updates will be posted on the [DOH website](#), and rest assured FDOE will provide you with updates as we have them.

To reiterate, there is still a low risk in Florida. Florida is fully prepared to respond to COVID-19. We will continue to provide regular updates.