

Flathead Valley Coronavirus Update March 13, 2020

Dear Families,

The intent of this letter is to keep our staff and families informed of the most recent and current information we have available regarding the coronavirus. While the symptoms of the coronavirus for the majority of people may be mild (especially for children), we do know that coronavirus can be very severe for a number of individuals; these patients may even require medical treatment. For that reason, today Flathead Valley superintendents had two separate meetings, one with the Montana Office of Public Instruction and one with the Flathead City-County Health Department. Please note that neither the Montana Office of Public Instruction nor the Flathead City-County Health Department is recommending that we close schools at this time. **Therefore, our schools remain open at this time.**

However, we are using this opportunity to plan ahead and communicate with all of our families. There are currently no confirmed coronavirus cases in Montana, but we are aware that may change as more testing kits become available to our state healthcare facilities. This situation remains very fluid, with our schools receiving information daily and sometimes hourly. We will continue to meet with area school districts and our Flathead City-County Health Department because our communities are interconnected.

Guidelines for School Closure

In the event we have a confirmed case of coronavirus in or associated with a school in the Flathead Valley, we will work collaboratively with the lead local health official to determine next steps. Currently, our plan will include closing the impacted school for a minimum of three days. This closure will:

- Give local health officials and school staff time to assess exposure of the known case within the school and trace the person's contact history;
- Allow school officials time to perform a thorough cleaning of the school, with particular attention to areas frequented by the known case;
- Provide time for public health staff, assisted by school staff, to identify and communicate with families of students or staff who are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus due to an underlying health condition;
- Create time for the school to prepare for possible virtual learning or take-home work that would allow students who may miss a significant period of time (due to quarantine or underlying health issues) to be supported and continue their education; and
- Develop a plan to provide for additional support as needed once the school re-opens.

Recommendations for Spring Break Travel

As spring break approaches, be aware that travel to some areas may result in restrictions for school attendance upon return. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued travel advisories for areas experiencing the coronavirus epidemic. Right now, the CDC is recommending that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China, Iran, South Korea, and Europe. You can check for updates at the following site: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>

Please note that:

- Any staff or student returning from a [CDC designated Level 3 location](#) will be required to stay home for 14 days after returning to the United States. *(These advisories can change on short notice, as the disease spreads. If staff or students travel to a location that is added to the list prior to the end of spring break, they will be held to the same standards.)*
- Staff or students who return and are sick with a fever or cough or who have trouble breathing should call their health-care provider before seeking medical care in order to avoid spreading the disease to others in the medical setting.
- If a person has a respiratory infection and a fever after interacting with someone who recently traveled to an impacted area, he or she should call a health-care provider as soon as possible.
- We acknowledge that postponing or canceling plans can be inconvenient and difficult, but we are asking staff and students to re-evaluate spring break plans if they intend nonessential travel.

Recommendations for Nonessential Large Group Gatherings

On the advice of the Flathead City-County Health Department, Flathead Valley schools will continue to evaluate nonessential large group gatherings. The purpose of this evaluation is to slow the rate at which people get sick in order to prevent overwhelming the healthcare system (often referred to as “flattening the curve”).

Columbia Falls School District #6 Information

In the Columbia Falls School District, we will communicate all information regarding travel and possible school closures through our district communication system. Although no school closures are currently planned, teachers are preparing instructional materials to meet student learning needs at home if the buildings do close. To best support all of our students, we need to know if you do NOT have internet access or a computer/chromebook your child could use at home. Please call your child’s school and let the office or the teacher know if your student does not have access to the internet or a device to work on. We will use this information to plan needed supports for your student.

Columbia Falls S.D. #6 has added nursing staff to provide immediate support for students and staff in buildings throughout the day. The school nurse in your child’s building has the authority to determine whether a particular child should remain in school or return to school after an illness. Fever, coughing, and shortness of breath are typical symptoms of coronavirus, so you should not send your child to school if he or she suffers from these symptoms. The child should stay home for at least 24 hours after the symptoms are gone. You should call your healthcare provider and report the symptoms.

CFHS attendance policy as it applies to excused absences will be suspended beginning Friday, March 13 through April 3 due to the current conditions with COVID 19. Further decisions regarding the CFHS attendance policy will reflect the emerging situation. In all district schools, students who are sick or who are subject to health restrictions will not be penalized for staying home.

Custodial staff have been added so that every building is being cleaned and disinfected every day, based on guidelines from the CDC for preventing the spread of viruses. Staff and students have regular access to handwashing and alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Teachers are reviewing with students how to cover coughs and sneezes and handwashing guidelines.

We urge all staff, students, and community members to continue to follow the protocols recommended by healthcare professionals in order to protect yourself and prevent the spread of illness.

We will continue to communicate more information as it becomes available. Please continue to monitor the District’s webpage and other social media accounts for updates. You may also find information on the Flathead City-County Health Department website at <https://flatheadhealth.org/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Thank you for your understanding as we continue to work together to keep our staff, students, and communities safe.

Respectfully,



Steve Bradshaw
Superintendent, Columbia Falls School District