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February 27, 2020

Partner in Health:

We understand that there is a lot of information circulating about the Novel Coronavirus, now known as COVID-19. We would like to share a situational update and some recommendations for schools based on from Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH), understanding that this is a rapidly evolving situation and information could change. We are also preparing a letter for you to send out to parents with similar information but wanted to provide you, school decision makers, with the most up-to-date information.

WHAT IS KNOWN

- The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified and causes a respiratory illness ranging from a mild cold-like illness to severe pneumonia.
- Most (81%) of people diagnosed with COVID-19 in China had mild disease.
- Similar to influenza, the people who are most likely to have severe disease and complications from COVID-19 are older individuals (>60 years old) and those with other medical conditions like heart and lung disease or diabetes.
- There is no vaccine or treatment currently available for COVID-19.
- Currently, there is NO confirmed community spread of COVID-19 in the US, but experts predict there will eventually be community spread.

HOW THE VIRUS SPREADS

- COVID-19 is believed to spread primarily the same way the common cold or flu spreads – through respiratory droplets that are produced when someone coughs or sneezes.
- People who are most at risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 are those who have been in close contact (within about 6 feet) with someone who has the disease.
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread of the virus might be possible before a person has symptoms; there have been reports of COVID-19, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO NOW, PRIOR TO COMMUNITY SPREAD

- Implement your annual seasonal influenza plan.
 - Students and staff who are ill, especially with acute respiratory symptoms (not allergies or chronic conditions), should stay home.
 - Review sick policies for staff; ensure staff can stay home when ill.
- Ensure prescribed cleaning is happening at school facilities (routine disinfectants are appropriate).
 - Enhance cleaning of high touch surfaces like door knobs, toilet handles, and sink handles.

- Ensure that hand sanitizer, soap/paper towels and tissues are widely available in school facilities.
- Remind students to cover their coughs/sneezes with a tissue or their elbow.
- Plan for when community spread occurs (non-pharmaceutical interventions or NPIs)
 - Ensure parents/guardians have a plan to designate a caregiver for a sick child(ren) if parents/guardians can't stay home.
 - Look for opportunities to address food insecurity for families who rely on schools for breakfast and/or lunch.
 - Identify at-home learning opportunities during student absences or school closures.
 - Identify how the school will communicate updates to parents/guardians.
 - For more information about use of NPIs to respond to pandemics, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/>.

MARICOPA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S (MCDPH) POSITION ON CLOSING SCHOOLS FOR COVID-19

- MCDPH examined the use of school closures to prevent disease spread during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic and ultimately decided that the strategy was not warranted. MCDPH was one of the first health departments in the nation to disagree with the federal recommendation to shut down schools and the rest of the US quickly followed suit.
- Careful consideration for school closure recommendations will take into account the severity of disease, benefits to public health, impact on student learning, families, childcare, school staff and the economy.
- Because most people with COVID-19 have mild disease, the likelihood that MCDPH will recommend closing schools is very low, but not zero. MCDPH will notify schools prior to recommending closure.
- Closing schools is not always the most effective strategy to slow disease transmission, particularly if children congregate outside of school.
- Schools in Maricopa County considering closure due to COVID-19 (or other infectious diseases) should work with Public Health before closing. Please contact MCDPH if you are considering closing a school.

MCDPH staff are working day and night to monitor this evolving situation and will continue to provide new information to the community as things change. If you have questions or are seeing increases in illness and would like to consult with our team, please call us at 602-506-6767.

Please follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/MaricopaHealth or at www.maricopa.gov/coronavirus.

Sincerely,



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Director



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