

March 11, 2020

Partner in Health:

As partners in protecting the health and safety of our children and families, below you will find a brief situational update as well as current recommendations for school administrators and decision makers based on guidance from the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency (BHSJCHA). Please understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and BHSJCHA will continue to communicate with you as information changes.

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.
- More than 80% 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.
- As of March 11, 2020, there are 2 presumptive positive COVID-19 cases in Michigan. At this time cases are in Wayne and Oakland Counties.
- As of March 11, 2020, there is **NO** confirmed community spread of COVID-19 in Branch, Hillsdale, or St. Joseph counties, 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, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO NOW, PRIOR TO LOCAL COMMUNITY SPREAD

- Implement your annual seasonal influenza plan.
 - Students and staff who are ill, especially with fever and/or 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 (under the age of 60 years) 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/>.

WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS DO WHEN COMMUNITY SPREAD OCCURS

- Continue to ensure that soap/paper towels, hand sanitizer, and tissues are widely available in school facilities. Regular hand hygiene should be built into the daily routine.
- Consider limiting the number of people that have contact with students in the school building including parents or volunteers during the school day and gatherings that occur in the school building during non-school hours.
- Consider having students eat meals in the classroom or in smaller cohorts in the lunch room
- Avoid assemblies and multiple class activities to limit non-essential contact between students in large gatherings.
- Consider canceling or postponing events that bring groups of families and students into more frequent contact with each other.
- Have a separate room for sick children to be in while waiting for a caregiver to pick them up if they become ill during the school day.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS BEFORE CLOSING SCHOOLS FOR COVID-19

- The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency would recommend the closure of schools **only** if there is an imminent danger or the need to reduce transmission risk of COVID-19 disease.
- 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.
- Schools in Branch, Hillsdale, St. Joseph counties considering closure due to COVID-19 (or other infectious diseases) should work with BHSJCHA **before** closing. Please contact BHSJCHA if you are considering closing a school or prior to taking any actions.

Although some colleges and universities are choosing to move toward virtual instruction instead of face-to-face instruction, that does not mean that K-12 settings should opt for parallel action. Colleges and universities are dramatically different environments including unique opportunities for disease transmission, such as housing in dormitories, that are not present in K-12 schools.

BHSJCHA 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 517-279-9561 and dial 0.

For up-to-date information, visit www.bhsj.org.

Sincerely,

Rebecca A. Burns, MPH, RS
Health Officer

H. Lauren Vogel, DO, MPH
Medical Director