March 5, 2020

A message from Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department and the Puyallup School District

Dear students, staff and families,

We understand the recent news about COVID-19 has raised questions and concerns among students, families and faculty. We are working with Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (Health Department) to address those concerns.

Currently, Pierce County has no cases of COVID-19, but Puget Sound public health agencies are identifying more positive cases of the disease in our region. The risk in our region is increasing. We want to provide reliable, timely and accurate information so everyone can make the best decisions about the health of our community.

The Health Department doesn’t recommend school closures at this time. The decision to close schools is not taken lightly. We will determine school closures on a case-by-case basis after we consult with the Health Department. School attendance is important. Children or staff should only stay home if:

• They begin to feel sick.
• They have traveled to China, South Korea, Iran or Italy within the past 14 days.
• After traveling to an affected country, they begin showing symptoms of illness like cough, fever and shortness of breath.

The Health Department advises we take these steps to help prevent the spread of viruses, including COVID-19:

• Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds each time. You can also use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol. Using soap and water is preferred.
• Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
• Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
• Stay home when you are sick. Call your healthcare provider if you need medical care.

You may wonder if you should wear a mask when you’re in public. We recommend wearing a mask only if you’re sick, so you don’t expose others.

Schools play an important role to reduce the spread of diseases. Custodial staff work to keep our schools clean and safe. School nurses monitor absenteeism to help identify illness outbreaks. We teach students proper handwashing and basic hygiene to prevent the spread of germs.

Diseases don’t stop at city, county, or international borders. This coronavirus may have originated abroad, but not everyone with increased risk has the disease or was potentially exposed to it.

Get reliable information at tpchd.org/coronavirus. The Health Department regularly updates this page, including frequently asked questions. You can also sign up for public health blog updates at tpchd.org/notify.

Sincerely,

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
Puyallup School District