

March 23, 2020

Freeman Families, Students and Staff:

After consultation with our Health Department and other State and Local officials, **it has been determined that all schools in the ESU 5 Region will be closed through Friday, May 1st, with the possibility of schools being closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.** This decision will be re-evaluated as circumstances change, and another announcement will be made on April 22nd concerning the rest of the 2019-2020 school year. This is a precautionary public health measure; local health and school officials are monitoring the COVID-19 situation in Southeast Nebraska closely. School Superintendents met with Public Health Solutions and determined that this action would help prevent exposure to our area to flatten the curve and decrease the spread of disease.

More information regarding this closure will come from Mr. Havelka, Mrs. Sieh, and Mr. Schroeder. We know that you may have several questions as the days and weeks progress. We have set up a way for you to ask questions. Please use the link below and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

March 13, 2020

Freeman Staff and Families:

Good afternoon. I wanted to give you an update on what we have learned this week regarding COVID-19 and the steps Freeman will take. I apologize for the length of this communication, but do want to give our school community as much information as possible. All school districts, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure students have safe and healthy learning environments. Schools serve students, staff and visitors from throughout the community. All of these people may have close contact in the school setting, often sharing spaces, equipment and supplies.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), information about COVID-19 in children is somewhat limited, but the information that is available suggests that children with confirmed COVID-19 generally had mild symptoms. However, a small percentage of children have been reported to have more severe illness. People who have serious chronic medical conditions are believed to be at higher risk. Despite lower risk of serious illness among most children, children with COVID-19-like symptoms should avoid contact with others who might be at higher risk, such as older adults and adults with serious chronic medical conditions.

As of 4:00PM on 3-13-2020, our local health authority has reported NO known cases of “community spread.” **Community Spread** can be defined by having positive cases that cannot be tracked where they came from. Based on this, Freeman will continue to follow the CDC’s **Preparedness Phase**. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Reviewing, updating and implementing emergency operations plans.
- Develop information-sharing systems with partners.
- Teach and reinforce healthy hygiene practices.
- Intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts.
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism.
- Assess group gatherings and events. Consider postponing non-critical gatherings and events.
- Require sick students and staff to stay home.
- Create and test communications plans for use with the school community.
- Review CDC’s guidance.

Governor Ricketts, Education Commissioner Matthew Blomstedt and others addressed the state this morning regarding school closures. It was shared that if there are cases of “community spread”, the state will look at making decisions to close schools and ban large public events in that region for a period of 6-8 weeks.

What this means for Freeman:

At the time of this communication, **Freeman will continue to have school.** This may change within hours or days depending on new information that is received. I believe, in my opinion, that it is no longer a matter of IF we close school but WHEN. Freeman faculty and staff will begin to prepare our students for enrichment learning opportunities if school is cancelled for an extended period of time. I will continue to communicate with local health authorities and the Department of Education to provide the most up-to-date information to our staff and families. Above all, we will stay dedicated to keeping our students, staff and community safe during this unprecedented time.

Freeman will continue to stress the following **Personal Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPI)**:

- Hand washing with soap and water or using hand sanitizer
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into the inside of your elbow
- Staying home if you are sick
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces

On Monday, March 16th, Freeman will also begin to follow some **Community NPIs** that will help encourage social distancing. This list also includes local, regional, and state activities that have been postponed or cancelled.

- **Parent Teacher Conferences for March 16th and 19th have been CANCELLED.** Parents who wish to communicate directly with teachers are asked to reach out via phone or email. Elementary report cards and Grades 7-12 progress reports will be mailed home by Thursday, 3/19.
- **District Speech Competition scheduled for 3/16 has been cancelled.**
- **Junior High Wrestling at Malcolm on 3/17 has been cancelled.**
- **4th Grade Field trip on 3/18 has been cancelled.**
- **ESU 5 Quiz Bowl on 3/18 has been cancelled.**
- **Track & Field parents meeting on 3/18 will be postponed.**
- **State FFA and FBLA in two weeks have been cancelled.**
- **3rd Grade trips to Gold Crest have been cancelled.**
- **Morning weights will be cancelled for the foreseeable future.**
- **School salad bar will not be used for the foreseeable future.**
- **Adams Community Library will be closed for the foreseeable future.**
- **Beginning Monday, March 16th we will be implementing a NO VISITORS rule.** This includes:
 - **Classroom visits**
 - **Eating lunch with students**
 - **Teammates mentor/mentee meetings**
- Parents picking up students please call the office before they arrive so office staff can call the student down to the office and leave when parents approach the building.

- Parents dropping off students please call the office before they arrive or use the intercom/bell system instead of entering the building.

Please understand that these interventions are being done out of an abundance of caution and with the intent to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases.

I will continue to release information to our families and staff as I learn it. I understand that there are more questions at this point than there are answers. We will continue to follow the guidance from local health authorities and prepare Freeman students for an extended period away from school. As always, if you have any questions, please call or email. Thanks again for your patience and understanding as we work through this unprecedented time.

Andrew Havelka
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Novel Coronavirus: Events, Public Gatherings, and Schools Guidance

Background:

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by a new virus strain that can spread from person to person, causing severe illness including pneumonia in some people.

Symptoms can appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. The most common symptoms reported are:

Fever



Cough



Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing



Purpose of Guidance:

The purpose of the document is to provide recommendations and guidance for events and public gatherings to help limit people's exposure to COVID-19 to protect people attending and working the event as well as the community. These recommendations are intended for organizers and staff responsible for planning events with a large number of people in attendance (more than 250 people). Additional guidance is provided for school closures. This guidance is not intended to close office buildings or workplaces with 250 or more people.

Events include concerts, festivals, conferences, worship services, sporting events, and other such events.

One critically important way to slow the spread of respiratory viral infections, like COVID-19, is to reduce close contact (increasing social distancing).

Nebraska DHHS outlines two (2) scenarios that should be considered by event organizers and communities, as well as, closure guidance for schools.

Community transmission (i.e. where we cannot identify a direct link to a case) triggers for closure by community size or region:

- For Omaha: 2 cases of community transmission
- For Lincoln: 1-2 cases of community transmission
- For other Nebraska communities and Nebraska's Education Service Units (ESUs): 1 case of community transmission



Before community transmission it is critical that:

- Event organizers:
 - **Limit the size of events and public gatherings (e.g. parades, theaters, sporting events, etc.) to less than 250 people.**
 - Collaborate and coordinate with community partners including the local health departments.
 - Create an emergency operations plan for how to modify, cancel, or postpone the event if community transmission begins in the community.
 - Start the event and use event communications to promote everyday preventive health messages, including:
 - ◆ Attendees and workers must stay home if they are sick.
 - ◆ Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - ◆ When washing with soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - ◆ Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing with a tissue then throw it away.
 - ◆ Encourage participants to minimize close contact (e.g. no hand shaking or hugging).
 - Provide prevention supplies as available. Plan to have extra supplies for attendees and workers like sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, and tissues. Promoting frequent and proper hand hygiene.
 - If workers or attendees develop symptoms, provide a designated space separated from the other attendees/workers for them to remain until they are able to go home.
 - If the event location, audience, or other major details can be modified consider:
 - ◆ Televising the event
 - ◆ Held outdoors or move to a location where people can spread out more (e.g. larger venue)
 - ◆ Teleconferences/video-conferences
 - ◆ Reducing the audience size (e.g. immediate family member attendance, limited number of tickets)
 - ◆ Spreading people out (e.g. less individuals at tables, spreading desks apart)
 - ◆ Or other ways to limit the number of people gathered in an enclosed space
 - ◆ Consider postponing an event to a later date.

Consider creating refund policies or remote participation opportunities to further encourage staying home if they are sick or caring for the sick.

After community transmission has begun:

- Event organizers:
 - **Limit the size of events and public gatherings (e.g. parades, theaters, sporting events, etc.) to 20-50 people.**
 - Put your emergency operations and communications plans in action.
 - Collaborate and coordinate with community partners including the local health departments.
 - Anticipate events may need to be modified (e.g. teleconference/video-conference), canceled, or postponed.
 - Cancel events primarily for or attended by older adults and people with chronic medical conditions at higher risk for severe illness.
 - Start the event and use event communications to promote everyday preventive health messages, including:
 - ◆ Encourage attendees and workers to stay home if they are sick.
Consider creating refund policies or remote participation opportunities to further encourage staying home if they are sick or caring for the sick.

- ◆ Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - ◆ When washing with soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - ◆ Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing with a tissue then throw it away.
 - ◆ Encourage participants to minimize close contact (e.g. recommend no hand shaking or hugging).
- Provide prevention supplies as available. Plan to have extra supplies for attendees and workers like sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, and tissues. Promoting frequent and proper hand hygiene.
 - If workers or attendees develop symptoms, provide a designated space separated from the other attendees/workers for them to remain until they are able to go home.
 - If the event location, audience or other major details can be modified consider:
 - ◆ Televising the event
 - ◆ Held outdoors or move to a location where people can spread out more (e.g. larger venue)
 - ◆ Teleconferences/video-conferences
 - ◆ Reducing the audience size (e.g. immediate family member attendance, limited number of tickets)
 - ◆ Spreading people out (e.g. less individuals at tables, spreading desks apart)
 - ◆ Or other ways to limit the number of people gathered in an enclosed space
 - ◆ Consider postponing an event to a later date.
 - Maintain a registration list of attendees and staff. This will significantly assist local public health in contact tracing in the event a COVID-19 case should later be identified as having attended the event.

- **School Closure guidance for after community transmission has begun:**

Reports suggest that school age students are not shown to be a high risk group for serious illness from COVID-19. Despite this, closures are recommended to protect family members who might be in a high risk group, the community, and minimize the spread of illness.

- It is recommended to close schools in the event community transmission has begun in your area.
 - ◆ **Schools should consider modifying attendance to classes (e.g. remote options like video-conference, recorded sessions, etc.) or cancel classes for 6-8 weeks and reevaluate reopening every 2 weeks thereafter for community transmission.**
 - ◆ Schools should modify, postpone, or cancel extracurricular events.
 - ◆ Collaborate and coordinate with community partners including the local health departments.

March 11, 2020

Freeman Staff and Families:

Good morning. As you may have heard, there has been a 5th confirmed case of COVID-19 in Nebraska and it involves a student from Crofton. Freeman did compete against Crofton in district basketball on Friday, February 28th in Columbus. This morning I have been in contact with the Crofton Superintendent and it was confirmed that the student did NOT attend the game in Columbus.

We will continue to work through and communicate any new information the best we can. I have also been in contact with the department of Education and our local health authorities the last few days collecting information and preparing for potential next steps. At this time, we plan to continue having school at Freeman! Any changes to this plan will be communicated as soon as possible. We continue to stress the practice of good health habits, such as washing hands, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into the inside of your elbow, and staying home when sick. Included below is a document regarding family preparedness that was shared by Public Health Solutions. I hope that it serves as a good reference. Thanks, and have a great rest of the week!

Mr. Havelka

Get Your Family Ready for COVID-19

A COVID-19 outbreak could last for a long time in your community. Public health officials may recommend community actions to keep students and staff healthy, reduce exposures to COVID-19, and slow the spread of the disease. Creating a household plan can help you protect your health and the health of those you love. Base the details of your household plan on the needs and daily routine of your family.

Create a Plan

- ◆ Meet with family members and friends to talk about what you will do when COVID-19 disease comes to your community.
- ◆ Plan ways to take care of household members who are at higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19. Early information suggests older adults and people with chronic medical conditions are more likely to have serious illness.
- ◆ Talk with a healthcare provider about how to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.
- ◆ Think about local organizations you can contact for information, healthcare, or counseling services, food, or other supplies.
- ◆ Create an emergency contact list for family, friends, healthcare providers, the local health department, employers, schools, and other community resources.

Practice Good Personal Health Habits Plan for Home-based Actions

- ◆ Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- ◆ Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- ◆ Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into the inside of their elbow. Throw away tissue in trash after use.
- ◆ Frequently wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizer, especially after coughing, blowing your nose, or sneezing into a tissue.
- ◆ Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, cabinet handles, land-line and cell phones, keyboards, etc.) using a regular household detergent and water. For disinfection, use a household cleaner that kills coronaviruses.
- ◆ Choose a room in your house to separate sick household members from those who are healthy. If possible, have a separate bathroom for the sick person to use. Clean these rooms as needed, when someone is sick.

Be Prepared for School or Child-Care Closures and Plan for Potential Changes at Work

Prepare for Possible Quarantine or Isolation

- ◆ School dismissals and closures of child-care facilities to slow the spread of infection in the community may become necessary. Learn about your school's plan for continuing education and student meal programs if the school closures occur. If your child attends a college or university, encourage him/her to learn about the school's plan for a COVID-19 outbreak.
- ◆ Learn about your employer's emergency operations plan. Discuss sick-leave policies and telework options for workers who are sick or who need to stay home to care for sick household members. Notify employer as soon as possible if you will need to stay home.
- ◆ Have adequate food, medication, OTCs, cleaning products, pet supplies, etc. at home so you don't have to leave home during self-quarantine or self-isolation.

Put Your Plan into Action

Take Steps to Keep Children Safe During an Outbreak

- ◆ Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation. Get up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity from your local public health department. Stay in touch with others by email and phone.
- ◆ Continue to practice good health habits and stay home when sick.
- ◆ Inform your employer if you need to make changes in your work schedule.
- ◆ If your child/children become sick with COVID-19, notify their childcare facility or school. Talk with teachers about classroom assignments and activities they can do from home to keep up with their schoolwork.
- ◆ Keep track of school dismissals in your community. Read or watch local media sources that report school dismissals. If schools are dismissed temporarily, use alternative childcare arrangements, if needed.
- ◆ Discourage children and teens from gathering in other public places while school is dismissed to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

After a COVID-19 Outbreak in Your Community

Remember, a COVID-19 outbreak could last a long time. The impact on individuals, households, and communities might be great. When public health officials determine the outbreak has ended in your community, take time to improve your household's plan.

- ◆ **Discuss and note lessons learned.** Were your COVID-19 preparedness actions effective at home, school, and work? Talk about problems found in your plan and effective solutions. Identify additional resources needed for you and your household.
- ◆ **Participate in community discussions about emergency planning.** Let others know about what readiness actions worked for you and your household. Maintain communication lines with your community (e.g., social media and email lists). Promote the importance of practicing good personal health habits.
- ◆ **Continue to practice everyday preventative actions.** Stay home when you are sick; cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue; wash your hands often with soap and water; and clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.
- ◆ **Take care of the emotional health of your household members.** Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories about COVID-19. Connect with family and friends. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with others.
- ◆ **Help your child/children cope after the outbreak.** Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they went through or what they think about it. Encourage them to share concerns and ask questions. Because parents, teachers, and other adults see children in different situations, it is important for them to work together to share information about how each child is coping after the outbreak.



For more information related to COVID-19, please contact:
Kate Lange or Kim Showalter at Public Health Solutions, 402-826-3880 or
visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at: www.cdc.gov

Freeman Families,

As discussions and concerns over a possible outbreak of the Coronavirus COVID-19 continue, we wanted to reach out to families with updated information from the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This information is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of the virus and we will keep you updated as additional information becomes available.

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) virus, and we are learning more about it every day. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping the spread of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy.

Health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 into US communities. Schools can play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, schools can take steps to disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. Schools can prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their students and staff should local health officials identify such a need.

Freeman Public Schools will continue to collaborate, share information, and review plans with local health officials to help protect the whole school community, including those with special health needs. This message will also be shared with both the Adams and Filley village boards to raise further awareness at the community level. Our plans will be designed to minimize disruption to teaching and learning and build on everyday practices (e.g., encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely) that include strategies for *before*, *during*, and *after* a possible outbreak.

Below are specific steps that families can take and that Freeman Public Schools will be taking to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19:

Individual Level:

- Practice social distancing when ill
- Keep children home who exhibit cold and flu-like symptoms
- Encourage staff to refrain from coming to work if they have cold and flu-like symptoms

Handwashing:

- Encourage handwashing strategies that include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available
- Encourage all students and staff to use anti-bacterial soap.
- Encourage all students and staff to keep unwashed hands out of their mouths, eyes, etc.
- Teachers will review hand-washing techniques with students.

School/District Level:

- Discourage sharing of food
- Work with custodial and maintenance staff to perform routine environmental cleaning
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism
- Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school
- Continue communication with the Freeman school community
- Share overall school strategies for dealing with the spread of the virus should school/district be impacted

Thank you for your patience as we work through this matter. Have a great rest of the week.

Mr. Havelka