

Decorah Community School District
Message Regarding COVID-19
March 3, 2020



Good Afternoon,

As you are likely aware, there is an expanding global outbreak of a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. The disease the virus causes has been named COVID-19. While most COVID-19 cases are associated with travel to and from China, person-to-person spread is now being reported in other places, including Hong Kong, Italy, Iran, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand.

All Iowa public schools are working with state and local public health partners to review and update emergency response plans, to ensure we understand and implement regular preventative measures, and to consistently communicate with our staff, students, and families.

The Iowa Department of Public Health and Department of Education have partnered to share the following information with Iowa schools, and we are sharing that information with you.

It is important to prepare for the potential of COVID-19 in the same way we prepare for severe weather or other events that could disrupt normal routines.

- Make a plan and discuss it with your family. What would you do if you could not go to work or school because of illness? What if your daycare provider was ill? How would you get groceries if you were ill? These are all questions to think about.

It is normal to be concerned about a new virus.

- Being uncertain and anxious about COVID-19 is normal, especially with reports of illness and death.
- It is important to understand the risk of influenza is much higher than the risk of COVID-19 in Iowa right now.

While COVID-19 has drawn our attention because of national and world news, it is important to remember influenza is circulating at high levels. The prevention measures for influenza and COVID-19 are the same.

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your upper arm/elbow.
- Clean your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Contain germs by staying home when ill.

- It is critical for children to stay home when they are experiencing vomiting, diarrhea, and/or fever.
- Students should be free of symptoms for 24 hours before returning to school.
- DCSD is promoting proper hand washing by providing opportunities for hand washing and appropriate supplies, and continuing regular cleaning and disinfection of surfaces.

Advice for Talking with Children About COVID-19

Stressful situations often cause children to worry and have many questions about why something is happening and how it can be fixed. Your confidence and calm attitude will help your children ease their worries and feel safe and secure.

Helpful Tips Regarding Children and COVID-19

- Keep activities as consistent and normal as possible even if your normal routine changes. Ask your children what they have heard about COVID-19. Answer questions openly and honestly, at a level they can understand. Be clear and do not avoid difficult questions.
- Allow your children to express their feelings and concerns. Let them know it is okay to be afraid or mad. Ask questions so you can help them identify and cope with their feelings.
- Children always need to feel safe and loved. When they are uncertain about situations and afraid they may need even more affection and attention.
- Limit exposure to media and adult conversations about COVID-19. If your children are watching television, try to watch with them or make sure you are available to answer questions about what they have heard.
- Encourage healthy behaviors: eating well, sleeping well, and playing outside.
- Use their questions as an opportunity to let them know what they can do to avoid getting COVID-19.

Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking to Children

- School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
- There are things people can do to stay healthy and avoid spreading disease, such as:
 - washing our hands
 - covering our mouths when we cough
 - not sharing food or drinks
 - staying home when we don't feel well
- It is normal to be concerned about a new virus.
 - Being uncertain and anxious about COVID-19 is normal, especially with reports of illness and death.

- Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to an adult you trust.
- It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not gossip about who may or may not be ill.

We appreciate your partnership in making sure our students are healthy and safe. If you have questions please feel free to contact me, or the school nurse who serves your child's school. If you feel your child is anxious or concerned about this issue, please contact the school counselor who serves your child's school.

Thank you for your support of Decorah Schools.

Sincerely,

Mark M. Lane, Superintendent of Schools