



Jefferson County Health Department
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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03/14/2020

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MEDIA RELEASE

Jefferson County Health Officer Orders Two-Week Suspension of Classroom and Extracurricular Activities for Jefferson County Schools

Oskaloosa, Kan. Jefferson County Health Officer Crystal VanHoutan, RN, BSN, has today ordered that all Jefferson County School Districts suspend classroom and extracurricular activities for two weeks, starting on Monday, March 16, as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19. School buildings can remain open during this period of classroom and activity suspension, and staff can report to school as needed.

The decision has been made pursuant to K.S.A. 65-119 and is due to the spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in nearby areas and concerns regarding the high number of students and staff returning from international and domestic trips where COVID-19 transmission has been detected. Early action to slow the spread of COVID-19 is a proactive approach to help keep staff, students, and the entire Jefferson County community healthy. Currently infection risks remain low in Jefferson County and this is a precautionary action.

The decision to suspend classroom and extracurricular activities was made in joint consultation with the six Jefferson County school district superintendents and the Keystone Learning Academy Director. Schools represent a high-risk environment for virus transmission due to the close contact of students and staff for prolonged periods of time. A large number of new infections within a short window of time (initiated by students and faculty unknowingly infected during their travels) could result from concentrated public gatherings without adequate precautions. The rapid spread of local infections could potentially cause a large increase of cases in our community and put a strain on the ability of our public health and healthcare infrastructure to respond adequately.

This school closure period will allow for all school districts to screen students and staff for symptoms and possible exposure during travel during Spring Break for the schools. At the end of the two-week period, public health and school officials will reevaluate the situation.

Travelers coming back from international trips in [level 3 countries](#) (China, Iran, South Korea, and all of Europe including the United Kingdom) are **required to contact the Jefferson County Health Department at 785-403-0025 for guidance on next steps**. Travelers coming back from any other areas (domestic and international) including any locations in the United States which is now considered a Level 2 Risk, with active COVID-19 cases are recommended to closely monitor for the following symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever above 100.4F
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath/Difficulty Breathing

Jefferson County officials understand the inconvenience that this decision may cause. However, the first priority of the Jefferson County Health Department is to protect the health and well-being of the entire community. The Jefferson County Health Department will continue to work closely with school districts and independent schools to support their efforts and assist staff, students, and their families during this difficult time.

Human coronaviruses like the one that causes COVID-19 are most commonly spread through coughing and sneezing, personal contact like shaking hands, and touching a surface with the virus and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. There are simple steps everyone can take to help prevent spreading them:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a 60% or higher alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Practice **Social Distancing** if you are in public areas, at meetings and social gatherings.
- If you need to visit your primary care physician, call them first before arrival to alert them to your symptoms.

Social distancing means staying out of crowded places, avoiding group gatherings, and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible. Avoid shaking hands or close contact with persons to reduce risks of cross-contamination.

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Jefferson County Health Department is committed to working in partnership with our community to promote and protect the optimal health of all people by bridging gaps to eliminate health inequities, respecting the diversity of our community, through adaptive and innovative processes.