

March 2020

In follow-up to information shared by our school nurses in February, and as we move through influenza and norovirus (stomach flu) season while monitoring the progress of the novel (new) coronavirus COVID-19, it is important to be aware of ways in which you can slow the spread of or otherwise help prevent transmission of the viruses. The flu and viruses spread just like a cold - through the air by coughing or sneezing; through close personal contact, like touching or shaking hands; and by touching an object or surface with the virus on it.

All guidance we continue to receive from the Pennsylvania department of health and the department of education (PDE), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization stress the following:

- **Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow (do not use your hands) or with a tissue (discard the tissue in the trash)**
- **Clean surfaces frequently - countertops, keyboards, light switches, and other frequently touched areas. MOST importantly, wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol based hand sanitizer. Keep your hands away from your face.**
- **Contain - if you are sick, stay home until you are feeling better. Limit contact with anyone you know is ill.**

It is important to understand that although COVID-19 has caused a small percentage of people to become seriously ill and in some cases die, the virus often causes only mild symptoms or in some cases none at all. The most vulnerable are the elderly and/or those with underlying health conditions or with suppressed immune systems. As with influenza and the norovirus, people react differently to the coronavirus varying from mild or no symptoms to serious respiratory illness. The best prevention advice, as noted above, is washing your hands frequently, with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Here at Bellefonte Area School District we continue to monitor the virus situation as well as student absences. This time of year we often have a high number of absences due to the flu. We are encouraging our schools to support students who may be absent for long periods of time due to the flu or other viruses by allowing for leniency in absenteeism and with homework expectations.

Within our schools our custodial staff regularly clean our classrooms and public areas to ensure a clean learning environment.

As of now, we continue to hold after school and large group events and public gatherings, but again, we continue to monitor the situation. We will continue to follow our usual procedures with regard to illnesses unless circumstances dictate otherwise or if other guidance is provided from PDE. We will continue to collaborate, share information, and review plans with local health

officials to help protect the whole school community. We will inform you through our regular communication systems (email, text, phone, newsletters, eblasts, website, etc.) should the situation change or we have additional information or guidance to share.

Some resources you may access to further your understanding of COVID-19 include:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>