



To the Administrator Addressed

Commissioner Mike Morath

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| DATE: | February 6, 2020 |
| SUBJECT: | TEA Update – Influenza Virus |
| CATEGORY: | Commissioner |
| NEXT STEPS: | Report applicable campus and district closings to regional ESCs |

In recent weeks, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has worked closely with our regional Education Service Centers (ESC), the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to monitor the number of flu cases in communities across the state. As flu season continues, TEA, through the Education Service Centers, would like to begin collecting information on flu-related closures. This effort will increase statewide awareness as the flu spreads and help keep students in schools.

Many of you have firsthand experience with this year's flu season, including the need to close schools and school districts as a result of high absenteeism among students and staff. These closures have also meant the cleaning and disinfecting of entire campuses to help prevent the ongoing spread of the flu. In addition, there is concern regarding the spread of the novel coronavirus. While there have been a few reported cases in the United States, to date, there are no confirmed cases in Texas. It is also important to note **that health officials believe the risk to Texas continues to remain low.**

As a leader in your community, I urge you and your staff to continue taking the necessary steps that focus on preventing the spread of illness. These steps include:

- Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick.
- Educate students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their bent arm, and to wash hands after using a tissue.
- Teach handwashing techniques and provide time for students and staff to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer.
- Encourage students and staff to keep their hands away from their nose, mouth, and eyes.
- Encourage regular desanitization of commonly used surfaces using standard cleaning practices.

As part of your efforts, please consider the following related to school closures:

- **District/School Closures:** Remember, districts should have minutes built into their school calendar that allow for closure as a preventative measure or as a result of high absenteeism. TEA has historically experienced school closures when 15% - 25% of students and/or staff are absent.
- **Reporting All Closures:** Should you close either a campus or your entire district for health purposes (or if you have already had to close), **please notify your Education Service Center**. The ESCs are TEA's conduit to this critical information as TDEM and other state agencies monitor the spread of flu across our state.
- **Suggested Mitigation Measures After School Closure:** When a school closes, it is important that the district take appropriate mitigation measures to reduce the chances the flu will continue to spread after a campus or district is reopened. This includes

disinfecting common spaces like the cafeteria, bathrooms, and classrooms, but should also include disinfecting shared schools supplies, like calculators, crayons, and desks.

Use verified sources of information about the flu and coronavirus. On the national level, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides “Guidance for School Administrators to Help Reduce the Spread of Seasonal Influenza in K-12 Schools” on its website (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm>) and information on the rapidly changing coronavirus situation (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/index.html>). On the state level, the Texas Department of State Health Services provides valuable information regarding the flu (<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/flu/>) and coronavirus (<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>).

Finally, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has provided the attached letter template – specific to the coronavirus – should you choose to share information about this health outbreak while also providing some reassurance to your students, parents, staff, and community. The use of consistent health official approved language is important in this situation. DSHS is the state authority on all information about the spread of the novel coronavirus and it is a priority for the state to provide factual information during this time.

Thank you again for your commitment to student and staff health in your district. If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact TEA at disasterinfo@tea.texas.gov.

Mike Morath
Commissioner