

DATE:	February 28, 2020
SUBJECT:	TEA is Closely Monitoring Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)
CATEGORY:	Commissioner
NEXT STEPS:	Share with appropriate staff

The Texas Education Agency is closely monitoring media reports and information shared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding growing concerns about the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and is working closely with other Texas state agencies to prepare effective guidance for public school districts across Texas.

Though the situation is changing rapidly, it's important for school districts and community leaders to bear in mind how to prevent respiratory illnesses like the novel coronavirus.

Based on the most currently available information, health officials are recommending local communities and schools take the same necessary steps to protect against coronavirus that we take to prevent the spread of illnesses such as the flu.

All individuals are encouraged to:

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- 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.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- If you've not already gotten one, a flu shot is encouraged.

While these measures are simple, they work.

TEA is in the process of developing guidance for districts in the unlikely event of an escalation of the virus. The Agency is in regular contact with the state's 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) across Texas, multiple school districts, and the University Interscholastic League (UIL).

TEA is committed to ensuring that clear communication and guidance is provided to the state's 1,200 school districts, so that misinformation does not spread and misplaced fears can be properly addressed.

It's worth noting that in recent weeks, TEA has worked closely with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to monitor the number of flu cases in communities across the state. This effort will increase statewide awareness.

During this year's flu season, upwards of 50 public schools in the state have temporarily closed due to 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.

While there are a small but increasing number of reported cases of novel coronavirus in the United States, to date, there are no confirmed cases that originated in Texas.

TEA encourages the use and promotion of 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](#) and [information](#) on the rapidly changing coronavirus situation. On the state level, the Texas Department of State Health Services provides valuable information regarding the [flu](#) and [coronavirus](#). DSHS continues to mobilize, prepare, and plan for ways to keep Texans safe as new information emerges.

TEA will continue working closely with its interagency partners to ensure that school districts across Texas have access to and awareness of the most current and valuable information on the virus. The Agency’s paramount concern here is that districts, students, and parents remain informed and stay healthy and safe.

For Further Information

If you have further questions about the agency’s preparedness and guidance, please contact disasterinfo@tea.texas.gov. We will have additional updates for you in the days and weeks to come. Thank you for all the good work you do for the school children of Texas.

Commissioner Mike Morath