Recommendations for Messaging and Media Inquiries

School District (K-12) Communications

Schools play an integral role in protecting the health and safety of their district’s staff, students and families.

Having a communications response plan BEFORE and DURING the onset of an emergency or disaster is an important tool when responding to inquiries from staff, the public and media.

The following checklist has been created to assist school districts in developing and/or improving plans to prepare for and respond to an influenza outbreak:

Staff

- Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering fundamentals (e.g., signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g., hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
- Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation and plan communication accordingly.
- Ensure that communication is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Disseminate information to employees about your preparedness and response plan.
- Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees and family members.
- Promote County/Public Health platforms (i.e., hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating status and actions to staff, vendors, suppliers and customers in and outside the work environment.
- Identify community resources for timely and accurate information.
- Create plans for addressing staff/student absenteeism due to illness (e.g., lesson plans, make up work).

Public

Informed messaging is a vital component of ensuring the public’s best health and well-being. The following are sample key messages for school district officials to utilize during an outbreak:

- We know this is an anxious time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We are working closely with local health officials to deal with the situation and will keep our staff, students and families updated with any important information.

- Families can help protect themselves and prevent the spread of flu/coronavirus by taking the following precautions: Wash hands often and with soap and water for 20 seconds; cover coughs and sneezes with tissue or by coughing into the inside of your
elbow; stay at least six feet away from people who are sick; stay home and away from other people when you are sick.

**Media**

While the future cannot be predicted, having some prepared messages can provide essential information and guidance on whatever the current event entails.

The following are resources to consult in the development of your messages:

**Web**

- www.rivcoph.org/coronavirus.aspx
- www.rivco-diseasecontrol.org

**Social media**

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/countyriversidedepartmentofpublichealth/
- Twitter: @rivcodoc and @rivhealthdir1

**Contact:**

- Jose Arballo, Jr., Senior Public Information Specialist
  
  Email: jarballojr@ruhealth.org
  
  Phone: 951.712.3705

- Riverside University Health System–Public Health Disease Control
  
  Phone: 951.358.5107

*During large-scale events, be sure to coordinate messaging with the Joint Information Center.*

Building a strong relationship with the local health department is critical for developing a meaningful plan. The key planning activities in this checklist build upon existing contingency plans recommended for school districts by the U.S. Department of Education ([https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus?src=feature](https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus?src=feature)).