

Dear Families and Staff,

With this letter, we are providing families and staff an update with the latest, timely information on preparedness and response efforts during the nationwide coronavirus situation and answers to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

At this time, there are no confirmed or presumptive cases of the virus in Canton.

We have identified one teacher at the JFK Elementary School, whose spouse is under self-quarantine after attending an event last week where someone else became sick. Out of an abundance of caution, that teacher will not be in attendance at JFK until a 14-day period has elapsed. Neither the teacher nor her spouse are showing any symptoms of COVID-19, the illness associated with the novel coronavirus.

We have been advised by the DPH that this teacher's level of risk for COVID-19 does not warrant any further action of those who came into contact with the teacher. Thankfully, we have been advised that health officials do not believe, based on the teacher's level of exposure -- being married to a person who was at a gathering where someone else became sick -- does not raise any additional dangers for the school community in Canton.

When it comes to the novel coronavirus, we are proceeding with the utmost caution. The health, wellbeing and safety of our students, faculty and staff is paramount at all times, and we are reviewing all guidelines and information available from the Department of Public Health.

All schools are open and will remain open and operating on a normal schedule. The Canton Public Schools leadership is following the guidelines and recommendations of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). At this time, public health officials are NOT advising the closure of public schools or public buildings.

We are also working closely with the Canton Board of Health on planning and response plans. Public health emergencies and viral outbreaks are among the many crises that municipalities and school districts plan for on a regular basis, and we feel we are well-suited to respond to coronavirus, should things escalate on a wider scale.

The DPH recommends that residents continue with good hygiene practices including:

- Practice good hand hygiene! Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds including under your fingernails. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol content) can be used when soap and water are not available.
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing with a tissue and discard it immediately. Cough into the sleeve over your elbow instead of your hand. Wash your hands often when coughing and sneezing.
- Stay away from people who are sick and stay home when you are sick.

For more information, visit the [Canton Public Schools coronavirus resource page](#) or visit DPH website by [clicking here](#) and the CDC's website by [clicking here](#).

The District will continue to provide accurate and timely updates as information is made available. I sincerely appreciate that Canton is a community that works well together on behalf of all our residents and staff in the face of a potential crisis.

Frequently asked questions:

Why not just close the schools for a few days?

At this time, there is no reason to close the schools. The Department of Public Health has recommended that schools and public buildings remain open. We are acting under that advice, and we are receiving daily updates from local, state and federal public health officials.

What are you doing to ensure a clean and safe learning environment?

We have an excellent facilities staff at the Canton Public Schools. We have disinfecting solutions and modern cleaning equipment, and our staff is used to performing deep cleanings of our buildings, especially around flu season. We are performing periodic cleanings with cleaning sprays and electrostatic machines, which are particularly effective at mitigating infections and viruses, with special attention to commonly touched surfaces and objects.

I keep hearing about "close contacts." What is a close contact?

According to DPH, a "close contact" is a person that has been within six feet of a person with a confirmed case of an infectious disease for longer than 15 minutes at one time, or in direct contact with infectious secretions, while the case was likely to be infectious. A person is likely to be infectious from when they begin exhibiting symptoms up until at least 24 hours after they are symptom free.

What if I was near someone who was exposed or diagnosed?

If an individual was in the same location as a person with COVID-19 before they had symptoms, even if they were in close contact, health officials stress that the risk is reduced. According to the CDC: "People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest)."

In addition, health officials advise that walking through a building or room where there is or was a positive case of COVID-19 does not mean you are a close contact.

What if I feel sick?

As always, if anyone displays [symptoms of COVID-19](#), including a fever, cough or shortness of breath, they should not come to work or school and they are advised to contact their primary care physician. Also, if you believe you have had contact with an individual who has been exposed to COVID-19, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 617-624-6000 and the Town's Public Health Office at 781-821-5021.