



March 15, 2020

For immediate release

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Panhandle Schools Close at Precautionary Measure

After consultation with COVID-19 Unified Command, it has been determined that all schools in the Nebraska Panhandle will be closed for the next two weeks. This decision will be re-evaluated on Friday, March 27, 2020, with parents and families updated accordingly and extended as needed. This is a precautionary measure; there are currently no cases in the Panhandle. The State of Nebraska has elevated the risk assessment, and Nebraskans, in general, maybe at the same risk as travelers from other areas in the nation and other parts of the world. School Superintendents met with Unified Command tonight and agreed this action would help prevent exposure to our area to flatten the curve and decrease the spread of disease.

We ask that students and community members immediately begin engaging in social distancing. There will be no practices or school activities during the 14 day period. Unified Command has asked that anyone who has traveled to areas with community transmission of COVID-19 to self-monitor and self-quarantine. At this time, there are still no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Panhandle.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has declared that worldwide, including many states in the U.S, community transmission is occurring. Some countries and communities have widespread, sustained transmission.

1. This weekend it was confirmed the first case of community transmission in Nebraska.
2. Our neighboring states are beginning to identify community transmission (Iowa)
3. Multiple large-scale exposure events have been identified in Omaha, which raises concerns about additional community transmission regionally and possibly statewide.

In light of these developments, we are modifying our risk assessment and the allocation of valuable public health resources. These updates are in reaction to the rapidly evolving epidemiology of this virus: community transmission changes everything. **Nebraskans in general may soon be at the same risk as travelers from other areas in the nation and other parts of the world.**

Public health recommendations for travelers:

- A. All returning travelers have an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19
- B. All returning travelers should limit public interactions, practice strict social-distancing, and self-monitor for symptoms
- C. If a returning traveler develops fever or respiratory illness, they need to IMMEDIATELY self-isolate and report to a provider or call Panhandle Public Health District’s 24/7 line at 308-262-5764.
- D. Returning travelers need to track the publicly reported COVID-19 disease burden in the areas to which they have travelled through both the local/state public health departments and public media websites. Areas with widespread sustained transmission, please see list below, are at increased risk and of special concern. Such travelers should self-quarantine for 14 days and immediately report any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection to their health care provider. Individuals unable to observe the 14-day self-quarantine should consult with Scotts Bluff County: 308-630-1580, all other Panhandle counties: 308-262-5764.
- E. Health care workers with a travel history from an area with widespread sustained transmission or other high-risk exposure should consult with a trained medical professional (e.g. infection preventionist or physician) at their facility and establish an infection control protocol (e.g., home quarantine, self-monitoring, PPE while at work etc.) that mitigates the risk of patient and co-worker exposure.

Areas with widespread sustained transmission, are at increased risk and of special concern. Such travelers should self-quarantine for 14 days and immediately report any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection to their health care provider. Individuals unable to observe the 14-day self-quarantine should consult with Scotts Bluff County: 308-630-1580, all other Panhandle counties: 308-262-5764. Visit www.pphd.org for self-quarantine guidance.

United States: Check here for updates - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-in-the-us.html>

<p>California state counties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contra Costa • Los Angeles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cities of Los Angeles & Anaheim • Riverside • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Francisco • San Mateo • Santa Clara • Sonoma • Solano 	<p>Colorado state counties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eagle • Gunnison • Pitkin • Summit • All ski resorts <p>Houston, Texas</p> <p>Iowa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carroll • Dallas • Harrison • Johnson 	<p>New York state</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New York City Nassau • Suffolk <p>Reno, Nevada</p> <p>Washington state counties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ City of Seattle • Snohomish
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yolo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pottawattamie 	
<p>Internationally: Check here for updates - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China • Italy • Iran • South Korea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City 	

We thank you for your cooperation, these are unprecedented times and it will take each person doing their part to reduce the spread of COVID-19. **Students and families, please do not gather at alternate locations. Help keep our communities safe and protect our most vulnerable populations!**

Panhandle Public Health District will keep you posted in this quickly changing environment. We continue to monitor the unfolding COVID-19 epidemic to anticipate its impact on the Panhandle. We are working as a unified command with Region 21, 22, and 23 Emergency Managers, and Scotts Bluff County Health Department on this evolving situation. We will continue to communicate important updates to the public and our partners. The CDC is putting out updated guidance daily; for the most up to date information visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>. To learn more about COVID-19, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/covid19>.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website www.pphd.org.