



**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Meenakshi G. Brewster, MD, MPH - Health Officer

Administration, Records & Health Services: 301 – 475 – 4330

Environmental Health: 301 – 475 – 4321

Medical Assistance Transportation: 301 – 475 – 4296

Maryland Relay Service: 1 – 800 – 735 – 2258

Email: smchd.healthdept@maryland.gov

March 3, 2020

Dear School Administrator:

This communication is to assist your team with preparedness activities related to the quickly evolving worldwide epidemic of novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). As you may know, the situation related to COVID-19 is escalating rapidly with new U.S. states and residents affected nearly daily. At the time of this communication, there are no identified cases of COVID-19 in St. Mary's County or in Maryland. However, we do anticipate that this will change as the epidemic continues to grow and testing criteria expands.

Communication is key in this stage of preparedness. St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) in collaboration with the St. Mary's County (SMC) Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has instituted the following:

- Joint Information Command (JIC) [virtual at this point in time] - to designate someone from your organization to assist with this please contact smchd.pr@maryland.gov with your designee's contact information.
- Regular periodic emails to local partner organizations about preparedness activities and situational updates - to be included in the distribution list for this, please contact smchd.pr@maryland.gov
- Periodic in-person situational updates/preparedness discussions at the SMC Emergency Operations Center. This is intended for organizational partners involved in local preparedness/response activities. To include a designee from your school in these meetings, please send a request to the SMC Emergency Manager at: Gerald.Gardiner@stmarysmd.com

If you have not already done so, I encourage you to keep your students and their parents informed about your organization's preparedness for COVID-19, and encourage infection prevention strategies such as hand-washing, staying home when sick, and paying attention to travel warnings issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For your ease, I am attaching a template letter that you are welcome to share with your parents or use as a reference in generating your own letter. Please consider encouraging your students/families to get information from reliable public health sources, including:

- St. Mary's County Health Department: www.smchd.org/coronavirus
- Maryland Department of Health: <http://health.maryland.gov/coronavirus>
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

As we do not yet have identified COVID-19 in St. Mary's County, I encourage your team to include the following considerations as you prepare:

- Review and update as needed your organization's Emergency Operations Plan (particularly infectious disease protocols) and Continuity of Operations Plan (to ensure how critical functions continue during high rates of absenteeism)
- Consider telework and flexible sick leave policies that encourage persons who are ill to stay home and away from others
- Post signage in your buildings with information about preventing spread of COVID-19 (examples in English and Spanish attached)
- Review with or remind students and staff/faculty proper procedure for handwashing with soap and water
- Encourage frequent handwashing with soap and water, particularly prior to food consumption or after use of bathrooms
- Make available alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol (automatic, wall mounted dispensers may be optimal) in spaces easily accessible by students and staff/faculty
- Monitor school and staff absenteeism, and please consider reporting significant fluctuations or an increasing trend to our epidemiologist at smchd.data@maryland.gov
- Additional guidance and suggestions for preparations are available at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus and www.smchd.org/coronavirus

Should we develop localized transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 in St. Mary's County, please be aware that we may need to implement community mitigation strategies for "social distancing". This may include school closures or dismissals, cancellation of group events (such as sporting events, extracurricular clubs), and closure of spaces for social gathering (such as student lounges, etc). "Grab and go" bagged lunches or meal delivery may need to be considered in some settings with students in residence. Schools may want to consider distance learning strategies and virtual study groups to maintain some academic continuity.

Thank you so much for your attention to this important and emerging issue. I understand the challenge of preparing for what has thus far been a rapidly changing worldwide situation. Please connect with our Infectious Disease Control Program at (301) 475-4330 should you need additional guidance. Thank you to you and your teams for your dedicated efforts in protecting the health of our students and residents here in St. Mary's County.

Sincerely,



Meenakshi Brewster, MD, MPH, FAAFP
St. Mary's County Health Officer



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Dear School Students and Parents/Guardians:

St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) understands the concerns many people have over the potential spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to our area. Despite COVID-19 being detected in the United States, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting that risk to the general American public remains low at this time.

SMCHD is working closely with local, state, and federal partners to monitor the worldwide situation. Local partners, including schools, are collaborating in actions to prevent the spread of disease and prepare for the impact of COVID-19. Please consider accessing the SMCHD website for updates and information at: <http://www.smchd.org/coronavirus/>.

There currently is not a vaccine to prevent COVID-19; however, everyday actions can help prevent the spread of this and other respiratory illnesses. These actions include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; if soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and throwing the tissue in the trash
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched frequently

At this time, it is **not** recommended that healthy persons who are well use facemasks; facemask use is recommended for those who are showing symptoms of illness (coughing, sneezing, fever, etc.) or those caring for people showing symptoms (such as healthcare providers).

While the influenza vaccine does not protect against COVID-19, it is still recommended that everyone over the age of six months be vaccinated for the flu. Less flu decreases the demand on medical resources and supplies that may also be needed for COVID-19.

If you are concerned about having COVID-19 because of your travel history or exposure to someone who has COVID-19, please make sure to **call ahead** to your health care provider before coming in for a medical evaluation.

Individuals should consider travel warnings when planning travel - consult the website for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and check back frequently as the worldwide situation is evolving rapidly at this time: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

Meenakshi Brewster, MD, MPH, FAAFP
St. Mary's County Health Officer

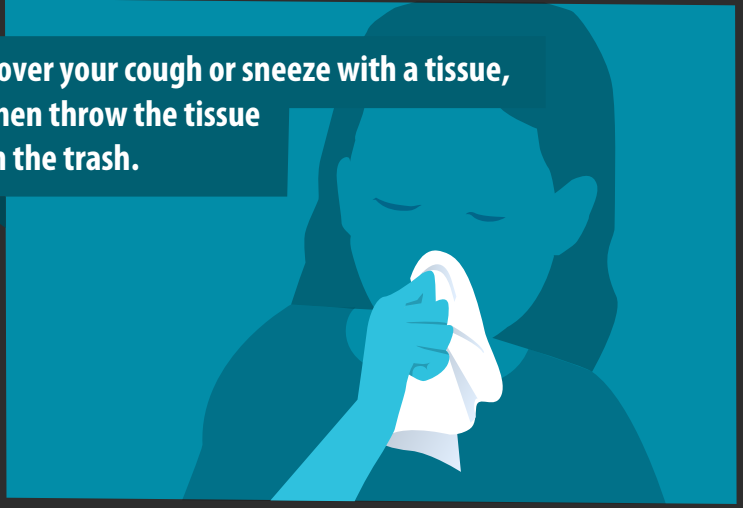
STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

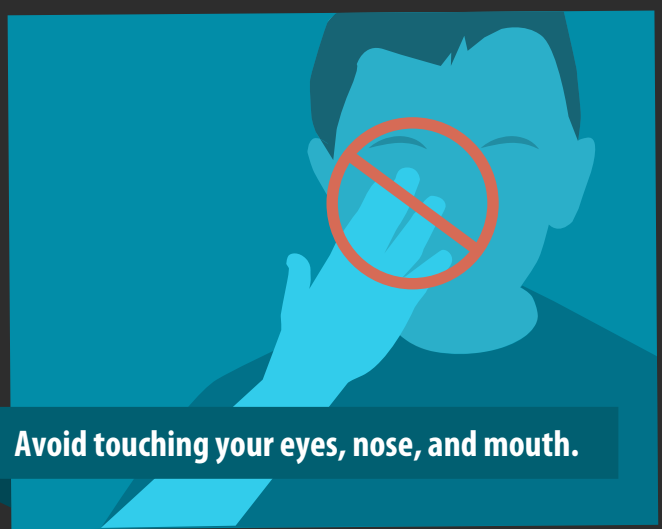
Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Ayude a prevenir la propagación de virus respiratorios como el nuevo COVID-19.

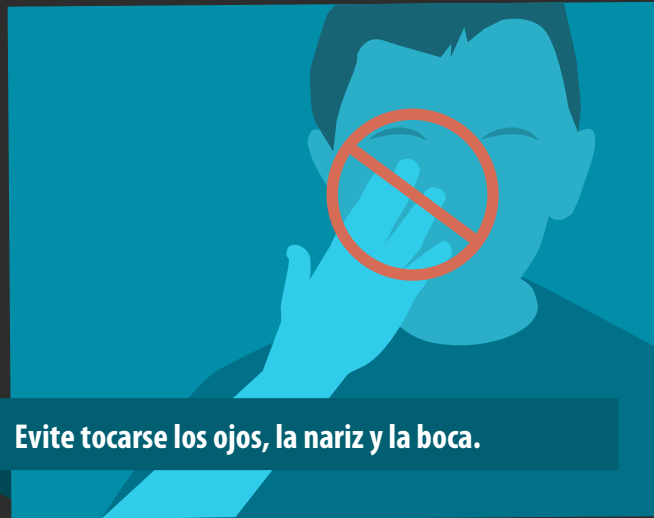
Evite el contacto cercano con las personas enfermas.



Cúbrase la nariz y la boca con un pañuelo desechable al toser o estornudar y luego bótelos a la basura.



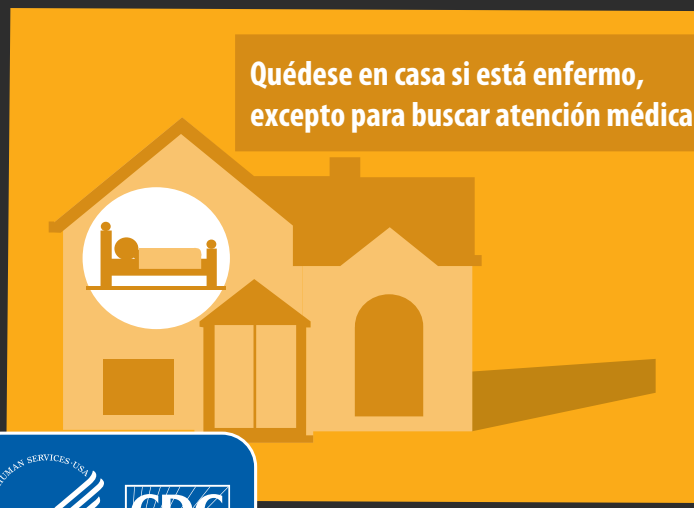
Evite tocarse los ojos, la nariz y la boca.



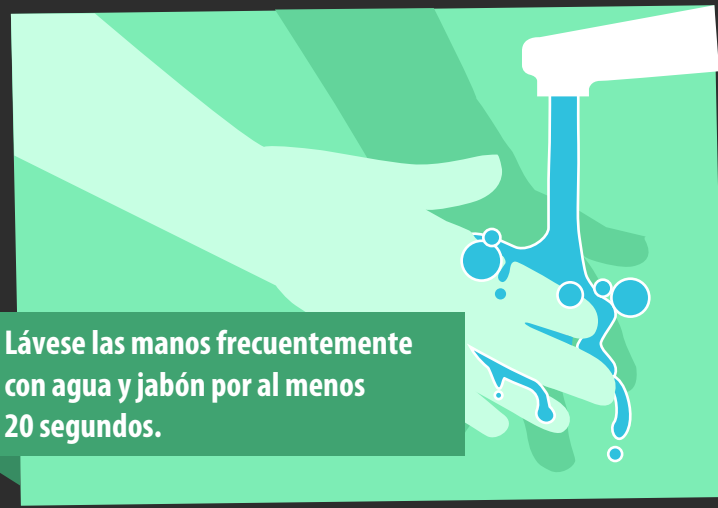
Limpie y desinfecte los objetos y las superficies que se tocan frecuentemente.



Quédese en casa si está enfermo, excepto para buscar atención médica.



Lávese las manos frecuentemente con agua y jabón por al menos 20 segundos.



Para obtener más información: www.cdc.gov/COVID19-es