Dear Cougar Families,

By now, I think we’ve all heard of a previously unknown illness, COVID-19, which is caused by the novel coronavirus. It has affected people around the world, and several new cases were reported in Washington and Oregon over the weekend.

To date, there have been no reports of the illness in the Columbia River Gorge area or eastern Washington. With that said, this situation is evolving every day and I want to be sure you know where to find factual resources about the coronavirus. I also want to share what we’re doing here in Lyle to protect students, staff and the larger community.

**What we’re doing here at school:**

When situations like these arise, we take them very seriously and always review, update and implement procedures to ensure the health and safety of everyone.

Over the past few days, we’ve reviewed our infection control practices and looked for ways to further decrease the chance of viruses being passed around here at school. One resulting action is that our custodial staff will be disinfecting high-touch surfaces throughout the school more frequently for the foreseeable future. Bus drivers also are being directed to wipe down seats and hand railings in the buses.

It’s standard practice to ask staff and students to stay home if they are sick. This will be emphasized even more in the coming days and weeks. If your child doesn’t feel well the day before or the morning of school, please do a couple of things:

- Take their temperature. If it’s over 99 degrees, they shouldn’t be in school.
- If they are sneezing, coughing, have a runny nose or generally don’t feel well – keep them home.

Attendance is important, but so is the health of our students. We’ll work with them to catch up on their schoolwork later.

If your child shows symptoms of illness at school, we will keep them in the office and call you to pick them up. Because our ability to isolate and care for sick children is limited, it’s important you pick them up as soon as possible.

**How to protect yourself – and what to teach your kids:**

Start by practicing and teaching good hygiene:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash/sanitize your hands. Use soap and water or hand sanitizer, if soap and water are not readily available.
- If no tissue is handy, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow instead of your hand.
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after going to the bathroom or before eating.
• Teach good handwashing techniques to your children, including scrubbing both the front and back of their hands, and in between fingers. Wash with soap for at least 20 seconds. Singing Happy Birthday while washing is a good way to time themselves. Or sing the ABC song twice, all the way through.
• If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

By taking these steps, we can reduce the risk of getting and spreading viral respiratory infections, including the flu and the common cold, in addition to preventing COVID-19.

Please remember too that COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. Blaming others will not help to fight the illness. Sharing accurate information at this time will be far more effective.

Here are two places to look for good information. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has created a Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 website has information and resources for the community and specifically schools. The site also includes workplace recommendations and links to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) resources and information. Both the DOH and CDC websites are updated regularly.

Let’s acknowledge that this situation can be scary for all of us – students, parents, staff and community. I understand the deep concerns that arise when we are faced with new, previously unknown health risk to our students and our families. It’s important to stay calm and follow the instructions of our health officials.

If you have any concerns or questions, please don’t hesitate to contact Principal Smith or me directly. You can also check our website, https://www.lyleschools.org/Page/2823, for more information.

Sincerely,

Ann Varkados, Ed.D.
Superintendent