



# PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

prepared & empowered

February 2020

Dear Portland Public Schools families, staff and community members,

I am writing to inform you about steps the Portland Public Schools is taking, or preparing to take, to prevent the spread of Coronavirus 19 if there is an outbreak in our community. There currently are NO reported cases in Maine and the chance of an outbreak is quite low. However, we have been advised by the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to have plans in place.

I also want to use this opportunity to remind staff, students, and parents about steps we all can take to prevent the spread of this and other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu.

First, let me share some facts about the new Coronavirus 2019, also known as COVID-19. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China.

Symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. These can also be symptoms of flu and other flu-like illnesses, still circulating in our community. If you have any of these symptoms and have not been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, it is most likely you have a cold or flu. As a precaution, students or staff who recently traveled outside the United States and who have respiratory symptoms or fever should inform their health care provider about their travel history.

The coronavirus has been detected in at least 56 locations internationally, including the United States. The CDC is monitoring the situation closely and providing regular updates to health and school departments. Again, as of this writing, NO cases have been reported in Maine.

To help prevent the spread of any respiratory disease:

- Students and staff should stay home when they are sick. If students or staff members have a fever, they should stay home until they are fever-free without fever-reducing medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), for 24 hours.
- **Everyone – students, staff, school volunteers and visitors – should wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, about as long as it takes to recite the alphabet. The CDC says that is the first line of defense for fending off disease!**
- If you cannot wash your hands, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60-95% alcohol.
- Everyone should avoid touching their eyes, mouth and nose.
- Everyone should cover coughs and sneezes with an elbow or tissue.

Our hardworking custodians are doing daily cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched objects and surfaces. School nurses and administrators are working with the public health department and the Maine Center for Disease Control (Maine CDC) to keep updated on the situation. In the event of an outbreak in our community, we will follow CDC recommendations.

Those recommendations could include school closings. School closing decisions are typically made by the Maine CDC, and depend on the number of people infected and the risk of the disease spreading. We are working with MDOE to develop plans for continued learning during any closing.

I will continue to update you on any local developments. In the meantime, please take care. Stay home if sick, cover up coughs or sneezes, wash hands regularly and contact school nurses with any questions. More information on COVID-19 can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>

P425- ENG COVID-19 Feb. Letter 2020

**Xavier Botana, Superintendent**

**353 Cumberland Avenue, Portland, ME 04101 207-874-8100 [www.portlandschools.org](http://www.portlandschools.org)**