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Dear Parents of Humboldt County,

We are all closely watching what is going on with COVID-19 in the United States and across the globe and thinking about how it might affect our families and communities. The outbreak, which began in China, has now expanded to 50 countries, including the United States. Countries at higher risk of transmission now include South Korea, Japan, Iran and Italy, in addition to China.

This is a serious public health concern, and it will be important to keep up to date on the situation. As the Humboldt County Health Officer I want to assure you that all of us at the Public Health Branch of the Department of Health & Human Services are watching this closely and planning and preparing for the possibility of COVID-19 circulation in our community.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), residents in the U.S. are still considered at low risk for exposure to COVID-19 because we are not yet seeing many COVID infections in people who have no travel history or known exposure to people with confirmed infection. However, this community transmission is already occurring in other countries, and it is reasonable to expect the same to happen soon in the U.S.

**What can you do right now?** Because the risk is currently low in Humboldt County, following the standard precautions we take every year for influenza is the single best course of action you can follow:

- Make sure your family members stay home when ill.
- Review good handwashing with your children and encourage them to wash their hands frequently and particularly before touching their eyes, nose or mouth and before eating. Everyone should also wash their hands when they return home each day.
- Frequently clean commonly used surfaces in your home such as remotes, keyboards, doorknobs and countertops.

These measures are actually extremely effective in reducing the spread of illness and should be used whether we have one case or 100.

**What's next?** As we begin to see increasing cases of COVID-19, our current public health measures such as quarantining people at risk will no longer be helpful. Next steps will depend on how many people are becoming ill at once and how serious the illnesses are among residents.



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- If the numbers are small and the illness mild, standard flu precautions may be all that is recommended.
- If the numbers are large and there are numerous serious cases, the focus will necessarily shift to using community-level strategies to reduce spread. This typically means some form of “social distancing” to reduce gatherings of groups of people to create fewer opportunities for the illness to spread. These strategies may include canceling large events, encouraging people to stay home if they do not need to be out, and even consulting with schools about temporary closures.

We’re not there yet, but we may be heading there, and we’re doing everything we can to be ready. As this outbreak evolves, so will our approach to preventing and managing COVID-19 infections. We will continue to communicate frequently to make sure we all have the information we need to help keep our families and communities safe.

If you would like more information, please go to [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus) or visit Humboldt Health Alert at [humboldt.gov/humboldtthealthalert](https://humboldt.gov/humboldtthealthalert).

Sincerely,



Teresa Frankovich, MD, MPH

