**A letter provided by our Flathead County/City Health Department**

Dear Parents,

We understand that many of you may have questions regarding the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 and how it may impact the Flathead. We wanted to provide you some information on COVID-19, how to access additional information, and information on what we are doing in preparation. Please note COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation that we are following closely and will continue to update you as information is shared with us. We are in frequent communication with the Flathead City-County Health Department and are closely monitoring information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**What is a Coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Some coronaviruses have caused severe illness, such as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middles East Respiratory Syndrome). COVID-19 is caused by a new coronavirus not previously identified in humans prior to December 2019.

**What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness. It takes 2-14 days after a person gets the virus to become ill and present symptoms.

Symptoms include:

* Fever
* Cough
* Shortness of breath

**How does the virus spread?**

Most often, the virus is spread person-to-person through respiratory droplets. These droplets are produced when a person coughs or sneezes, similar to how the flu is spread. The droplets may land in the mouths or noses of people nearby, or the droplets can be inhaled directly into the lungs.

It is currently unclear if COVID-19 can be spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it then touching their own nose, mouth, or eyes.

**What can I do to protect myself?**

Currently, COVID-19 is not spreading widely in the United States. Yet, in today’s connected world, outbreaks of diseases are always of concern. As with seasonal flu and strep infections, there are precautions we can all take to remain as healthy as possible.

* Practice good health hygiene. Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Use Alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
* When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. You can also cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
* Avoid sharing drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, dishes, towels or other items. Wash these items thoroughly with soap and water after use.
* Avoid close contact with people who are sick whenever possible.
* Practice other good health habits: Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
* **It is important to keep children home from school when they are ill.**

**Where can I find additional information?**

The Flathead City-County Health Department is providing up to date information in the online and via in informational hotline:

* <https://flatheadhealth.org/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>
* 406-751-8188