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## COVID-19 Update March 1

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Reply-To: wheelercommunications@wheelerschool.org

To: "laurieflynn@wheelerschool.org" <laurieflynn@wheelerschool.org>



March 1, 2020

Dear Wheeler Community,

We have been following the increased intensity of the coronavirus COVID-19 story day by day, maintaining a focus on being prepared for what is inherently a difficult set of circumstances to predict with certainty. Today, like you, we learned of a presumptive positive case here in Rhode Island, and want to share with you how we are following and responding to evolving circumstances. Our full leadership and Health Services teams were on campus today to discuss ongoing preparation, prevention, and campus safety. I was also in communication with other Providence Heads of School.

For the past weeks, as you know, we have been following a range of sources, and we are in regular contact with our consulting physician. You can find ongoing resources we have shared here on our [Health Services page](#) regarding health alerts and recommendations for preventative measures from the CDC.

### Prevention

While the coronavirus has not been identified in the Wheeler community, as a precaution we will be intensifying our cleaning procedures across the whole school for a period of time going forward. We are asking community members---for the time being---to refrain from practices such as shaking hands and hugging when saying hello, and to use fist or elbow bumps instead. As Governor Raimondo said in her press conference this morning, every one of us has a role in keeping our community healthy. **Please stay home or keep your child home if ill, and continue to follow these basic safety precautions:**

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water; if those are not available, use hand sanitizer.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue away.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Do not share household items such as water bottles, utensils, towels, chapstick etc.
- If a child shows signs of illness and you have questions or concerns, please contact your primary care provider immediately.
- Get a flu shot.
- Please only wear a mask if recommended by a health care professional.

The CDC has posted a list of precautions to prevent the spread of coronavirus, which is also available on our Health Services page.

### **Travel and School Trips**

We know that many of our parents and families travel regularly, and with spring break approaching, it's likely that some will be traveling in the coming weeks. If you plan to be abroad during spring break or in the near future, we ask you to check entry and exit requirements for the U.S. and your intended destination(s) before your trip and again prior to your return. Many countries have instituted restrictions that may affect you, and these can change with little or no advanced notice. Please keep in mind that should you travel, conditions may change during that time. Wheeler will have to abide by all US State Department, CDC and RIDOH regulations upon your return, which could include monitoring and/or quarantine. **We ask that you please share information about any recent or planned international travel [using this form](#).**

We are actively monitoring our Upper School trips to Portugal and France planned for March break, and are exercising an abundance of caution on that front, given the emerging information. Neeltje Henneman will be in touch with those families directly this week. Of course, we also respect individual families' decisions as to whether to participate in any planned trip.

### **Extended Learning**

Our division heads are working on plans for extended learning in the event of school disruption, and we will work with local school and health officials on this front for their guidance. Should those plans become realized, the Divisions will communicate with you directly.

### **Talking to your children**

Two important notes in relation to your children. First, we know that our worries can impact those around us, and it is very important to remain calm and rational, given that we know that the chances of contracting the illness are still quite low. Here are some resources that can be used with your children, of varying ages:

[How to Talk to Your Kids About the Coronavirus;](#)  
[How to Talk to Your Anxious Child About the Coronavirus;](#)  
[Just for Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](#)  
[BrainPop Video for Young Children on Coronavirus](#)

Second, please reassure your children that the risk of contracting coronavirus is closely tied to one's recent travel history and the travel history of one's immediate contacts. Nationality itself is not a risk factor. Wheeler is, as always, committed to empathy, compassion and respect, and to combatting stereotyping that can emerge in the wake of a situation like this one.

We will keep in close touch with you, other schools, and the Department of Health in the coming days and weeks. For the moment, we'll continue to listen closely to our medical colleagues, confirm the well-being of our students as our primary focus, stay vigilant while we work to be rational and fact-based, and remain available should any questions arise on your end. As we do so, we will keep all of our health professionals, medical researchers, and those who are ill in our minds and hearts as we all work together.

Take good care,



Allison Gaines Pell  
Head of School