We’ve been hearing a lot in the news about coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. It’s understandable if you are concerned. I am concerned. The well-being of our students, staff and families is important to all of us.

It is also important to note that Iowa has no confirmed cases of coronavirus. Just yesterday, in a webinar with Iowa school districts, state health officials noted that the risk here remains low.

However, I want you to know how we’ve been preparing. First, Des Moines Public Schools is working closely with the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Polk County Public Health (PCPH), which provide regular updates, resources and guidance.

Every year the district plans extra cleaning and health education during flu season. That same work, coordinated by our health, safety and facilities staff, are the best steps to take in also preventing the spread of other viruses, such as COVID-19. We are also postponing or cancelling foreign trips that student groups had planned over Spring Break to areas with numerous Coronavirus cases.

DMPS will continue to communicate our ongoing efforts regarding the coronavirus. Late last week we posted a [page to the DMPS web site on Coronavirus](https://www.dmschools.org/coronavirus/). This page shares some of the information contained in this letter, additional links to and information from local, national and world health experts, and will be updated as needed in the days and weeks ahead.

Finally, you play a very important role in helping to prevent the spread of viruses. These steps may sound simple but, according to the public health experts, they are tried-and-true measures for all of us to take:

1. If you are sick, do not come to school: that includes staff, students, parents and volunteers.
2. Wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds before eating and after touching community surfaces. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer.
3. Refrain from touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
4. Cover your cough with the inside of your elbow, not your hands.
5. Avoid close contact with anyone who has flu-like symptoms.

We will continue to move through this together, and be responsive to our local, state and federal health experts as they guide us through this process.

Sincerely,

Dr. Thomas Ahart, Superintendent
Des Moines Public Schools