

March 12, 2020

FROM: Arkansas Department of Education

Updates to COVID-19 GUIDANCE

Governor Hutchinson held a press conference this morning and released a proclamation that details action to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The proclamation can be accessed here. Because Arkansas has been planning a COVID-19 response for months, the state is well-positioned to begin containment efforts. The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) will continue to act as the lead agency to work in concert with other state agencies to respond to the COVID-19 virus.

School and school activities will continue at this time, and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), in consultation with the Arkansas Department of Health, shall provide guidance to local school districts and institutions of higher education to address concerns related to the virus and take all actions necessary to ensure the continuation of education. **The Secretary of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, shall have sole authority to close public school campuses throughout the state for reasons related to COVID-19.** The situation will be monitored closely.

Planning

Should extended closures become necessary, the ADE understands the importance of coordination in planning and responding to needs and will provide as much guidance as possible in how closures should be conducted, including the handling of student and staff absences. The ADE is working with federal agencies and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to identify issues that will need to be addressed

if school closures become necessary, such as possible modifications to state testing windows and continuation of meals for students in need.

It is also important to note that The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has extended all approved 2019-2020 Alternate Methods of Instruction (AMI) applications for up to ten days.

Travel

State employees have been directed to clear their professional out-of-state travel plans with their Department's Secretary. All citizens are asked, however, to review and rethink travel plans to consider whether plans will put themselves or others at higher risk of transmission.

School districts should evaluate school-sponsored travel plans and ask school-district employees to consider risks associated with their personal travel plans, including spring break.

New Resource for Arkansas

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) is pleased to announce that UAMS HealthNow, its 24-hour digital connection to healthcare professionals, will soon offer free screenings for all Arkansans who have questions about whether they may have the COVID-19 virus. UAMS HealthNow site will have a screening tool with a series of questions about their symptoms, age, overall health, travel and other potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus and guide them regarding next steps, if any. This may include a video session with a UAMS HealthNow provider, advice to contact their local physician for further evaluation and possible testing for the virus.

People who have symptoms and who have been exposed to COVID-19 are urged not to visit a physician office, urgent care clinic, emergency room or hospital without first talking to the facility and getting instructions on how to prevent spreading the virus to healthcare providers and other patients.

This service will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to patients of all ages across the state of Arkansas and can be accessed from a smart phone, tablet, laptop, or computer.

<https://uamshealth.com/healthnow/>