



Shawnee County Health Department

**Shawnee County Health Department**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Shawnee County Health Officer Orders the Suspension of Classroom and Extracurricular Activities of Shawnee County Schools**

**Topeka, Kan.** – Due to the current, fast spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and concerns regarding the high number of students and staff returning from international and domestic trips where COVID-19 transmission has been detected, Dr. Gianfranco Pezzino, Shawnee County Health Officer, has ordered that all Shawnee County School Districts suspend classroom and extracurricular activities for two weeks (which is the estimated maximum incubation period for the virus), starting on Monday, March 16, as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19. Early action to slow the spread of COVID-19 is a proactive approach to help keep staff, students, and the entire Topeka and Shawnee County community healthy. Schools can remain open and staff can report to school as needed.

Schools represent an ideal environment for virus transmission due to the close contact of students and staff for prolonged periods of time. A large number of new infections within a short window of time (initiated by students and faculty unknowingly infected during their travels) could result from this situation and would potentially cause a large increase of cases in our community and put a strain on the ability of our public health and healthcare infrastructure to respond adequately.

At the end of the two-week period public health and school officials will reevaluate the situation.

**A press conference will be held at the Shawnee County Health Department – 2600 SW East Circle Dr, Topeka, KS 66606 at 5:30pm.**

Travelers coming back from international trips in [level 3 countries](#) (China, Iran, South Korea, and all of Europe including the United Kingdom) are required to **contact the Shawnee County Health Department at 785.806.6297 for guidance on next steps.** Travelers coming back from any other areas (domestic and international) are recommended to closely monitor for the following symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever above 100.4F
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath/Difficulty Breathing

We understand the disappointment and inconvenience that this decision will cause, however, the first priority of the Shawnee County Health Department is to protect the health and well-being of the entire community. We will continue to work closely with school districts and independent schools to support their efforts and assist staff, students and their families during this difficult time

Human coronaviruses like the one that causes COVID-19 are most commonly spread through coughing and sneezing, personal contact like shaking hands, and touching a surface with the virus



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. There are simple steps everyone can take to help prevent spreading them:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

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*Shawnee County Health Department is committed to working in partnership with our community to promote and protect the optimal health of all people by bridging gaps to eliminate health inequities, respecting the diversity of our community, through adaptive and innovative processes.*