

ARIZONA COVID-19 CONFERENCE CALL WITH ARIZONA SCHOOL LEADERS

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2020

2PM AZT

ARIZONA GOVERNOR: DOUG DUCEY

ARIZONA SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: KATHY HOFFMAN

DIRECTOR, ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES: CARA M. CHRIST, M.D., MS

GOVERNOR DOUG DUCEY:

Thank you very much. Good afternoon. This is Governor Doug Ducey, and I'm hosting this call together today in collaboration with Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman. Thanks for joining us, Superintendent. Superintendent Hoffman and I are unified in wanting to protect public health in our state, especially for our most vulnerable and our children. We are also joined by the Director of the Arizona Department of Health Services Dr. Cara Christ. Dr. Christ is leading the state's response to COVID-19. She previously led the state's response to H1N1, and she's an infectious disease epidemiologist. She's here to provide the facts on COVID-19, provide special guidance for our schools, and to answer your questions.

Combating COVID-19 is our number one priority right now in the governor's office and across state government, and I know it's something all of you are dealing with in your communities and school systems.

I want to thank all of the Superintendents and Charter School and education leaders around our state for all you are doing to keep people informed about COVID-19 and for rearranging your schedules to join today.

We've been conducting regular briefings, webinars and more to provide guidance to community stakeholders including school administrators and education leaders. We are also coordinating closely with experts on the ground, including hospitals, nursing home facilities and local health officials. All of this input has helped guide our actions, and we're grateful for these partnerships.

Yesterday, I took additional proactive steps to ensure we are doing all we can to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. I issued a Declaration of Public Health Emergency along with an Executive Order to help protect those most at-risk of COVID-19— our elderly citizens and those with underlying health conditions.

These are our latest steps, but they will not be our last steps.

I want to assure everyone that this will continue to be my top priority 24/7. And with that, I'd like to hand it over to Superintendent of Public Instruction, Kathy Hoffman. Superintendent.

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, KATHY HOFFMAN:

Thank you, Governor Ducey. Good afternoon, this is State Superintendent Kathy Hoffman, and I'd first like to provide some updates on how schools can prepare and keep everybody in our community healthy during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Arizona Department of Education has been fielding questions and calls from district leaders, teachers, and parents who have very legitimate concerns about COVID-19 and what they can do to prevent community spread. We will continue to follow the lead of Dr. Christ

and her team at the Arizona Department of Health Services and we are encouraging school leaders to listen to the experts at DHS and public health officials at the county level. By encouraging students and school staff to regularly wash their hands, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and routinely clean school facilities, we can do our part to make schools safe and healthy places for learning.

At this time, the Arizona Department of Health Services and county public health offices are not recommending widespread school closures. Should the situation change, schools should contact their county's department of public health for instruction and recommendations on closures. The Arizona Department of Education cannot order school closures and this decision should be made by each district or charter or school leader with guidance from local county health offices. As a proactive measure, in the case of school closures, the Arizona Department of education is developing an informal, preliminary guidance document which will be titled "Pandemic Preparedness" for schools. This document is still under review and will be released by 5pm today. And it will be published on our website at azed.gov. I will now go over a few of the main areas of concern and encourage our school leaders to read the document for more details when that's available.

So these areas are to respond to some of our most frequently-received questions from school leaders.

The first is around statewide testing and accountability. We have been working with our testing vendors if necessary to extend testing windows and we will also continue to monitor if a testing waiver will be needed from the U.S, Department of Education. In regards to our health and nutrition, we have worked with USDA to allow schools to begin summer food service operations and provide boxed meals as needed. This will also allow food to be provided off of school property.

In terms of instructional days, we will work with you, our school leaders to provide flexibility around instructional time requirements. For school funding

and school finance questions, given the nature of this emergency, we will work with you to ensure that school funding will not be impacted.

For special education, this is a complex issue. So I just want to say that it's critical to ensure that our medically-fragile students are protected and we encourage school leaders to utilize excused absences for vulnerable students. If there are school closures that exceed 10 school days, then the special education team will need to review IEPs to change placement and the school may be required to offer compensatory services. That said, we will continue to work with the federal Office of Special Education Programs to determine best practices going forward, especially considering the unique situation.

We again encourage school leaders to read through our document that is forthcoming.. There are still some details that we are still waiting for additional information from state and federal partners, and we are committed to updating school leaders as these questions are answered in a timely manner.

As the situation continues to develop, my team and I will also be in constant communication with Dr. Christ, Governor Ducey and other public health officials to provide the most up-to-date information and ensure that the State of Arizona is doing everything we can to keep every member of our community healthy and safe.

The wellbeing of students, educators and all members of our school communities is our paramount concern. The Department of Education will continue to support our school communities by providing necessary guidance and being as flexible as possible, to work with you as needed.

I'd also like to share that we are planning a follow-up webinar for our school leaders which will be next Tuesday at 2pm, so please stay tuned for more information about that.

Thank you for your time.

GOVERNOR DUCEY:

Thanks so much, Superintendent Hoffman and thanks for your commitment to Arizona's kids and public health.

Now I'm going to turn it over to the leader that's been leading the effort on public health in our state and specifically, this current crisis. She's someone who's been in the Department of Health Services for some time. She's a Medical Doctor. She led the efforts against H1N1. Ebola measles and now she's doing it for the present crisis with the Coronavirus. I'm going to turn it over to Dr Cara Christ and then we're going to take questions. Dr. Christ?

DR. CARA CHRIST:

Thank you, Governor Ducey and thank you Superintendent Hoffman.

I'm gonna start with the basics about this virus and what we know.

So COVID-19, which was previously called novel coronavirus, is a respiratory infection that can range from mild to severe, and in severe cases can be fatal.

The virus is spread person-to-person either from close contact with an infected person or contact with respiratory droplets produced when an infected person sneezes or coughs.

The symptoms can appear 2 to 14 days after exposure and are very similar to the flu. They include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

People most at risk for becoming infected with COVID-19 are those with recent travel to an area with ongoing transmission of the disease, and people with close contact to someone diagnosed or suspected of having the disease.

While the majority of people, approximately 80 percent, with the disease have experienced mild symptoms, there are specific risk groups that are at higher risk of severe disease.

And that includes the elderly and/or those with underlying chronic medical conditions, such as lung disease, heart disease, issues with their immune system.

In contrast though, kids do not seem to be severely impacted by COVID-19. Case reports indicate that most children have a mild or even asymptomatic disease.

There are several steps that individuals, families, and employers can take to help stop the spread of the disease.

Individuals can take precautions similar to those we recommend for the prevention of other respiratory illnesses. And the best way to prevent that is to wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. That's our preferred method. But if that is not available, we do recommend using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Staying home when you are sick.
- Covering your cough or sneeze.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- And if you need to see a healthcare provider, consider using telemedicine.

We are encouraging right now that people who are at high risk should be prepared in case there is an outbreak in their community. In addition to those prevention efforts I just discussed, we encourage them to also:

- Have supplies on hand, such as extra prescription medications, or over the counter medications.
- We're asking them to stay away from crowds if possible.
- And to have a plan to call your health care provider and identify who else can care for you if your caregiver becomes ill.

The latest information on the spread of COVID-19 in the United States and Arizona:

- As of today, the U.S. has over 1,200 cases and 36 deaths.
- To date in Arizona, we have had nine cases. Two of the cases have been confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the other seven are presumptive positive cases tested at our state lab. These labs are pending confirmation from the CDC, but we count them as cases and move forward to deal with them with public health.
- There are currently three cases in Maricopa County, five cases in Pinal County, and one case in Pima County.
- We do have community spread of COVID-19 in Arizona, and we are expecting more cases. Our goal is to mitigate the spread of this disease and lessen the impact on the people who are at highest risk for serious complications.
- The current transmission of COVID-19 in Arizona is considered minimal.

Schools are critical in the lives of our children and our families. And public health realizes that the role you play extends beyond just teaching our children- which is why it is so important that we do everything we can to keep our schools open and our children and teachers safe.

At this time in Arizona, we are NOT recommending school closures.

As public health professionals, we realize that school closures are an important tool for the mitigation of infectious diseases and there may come a time when that recommendation is made for Arizona.

However, this is not a decision that public health makes lightly, and there are many factors that play a role in this decision.

We take into account the extent of spread in the community, available options for alternate child care, the continuation of nutrition services, and many other things as we weigh this against the potential risk to our kids and families.

For instance, closing schools could actually result in the spread of the disease throughout our communities, if the kids are merely having to go to a different congregate setting for child care or to pick up their lunch and could come into contact with other children who are not in their normal cohort, it could actually extend it.

My team and I are continually monitoring the situation and assessing all options as we continue in our response.

We will keep you updated on the status of the community spread and our recommendations.

But we have specific guidance and recommendations for schools:

- The health and safety of our school systems is important. To prepare your school for COVID-19, review your emergency communications plan, sick leave policies, and distance learning policies.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage. Cross-train staff to ensure coverage in case people get sick and need to stay home.
- Communicate with staff and students about attendance policies and reinforce the importance of staying home when you are sick.

- And provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces—door knobs, keyboards, sink faucets, remote controls, desks— can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- Ensure students and staff have the ability to wash their hands with soap and water or have access to an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

During this time of the year, its normal to see an increase in individuals with respiratory and flu-like illness. Respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, can be similarly prevented. And you want to educate the students and staff about everyday preventative action they can take to protect themselves and those are the same guidance I gave earlier:

- Stay home if they are sick.
- Cover your coughs.
- Stay away from other people who are sick and wash your hands frequently.
- The other recommendation that we would make is to encourage students and staff to get their influenza vaccine.

For students that are ill, we recommend that you follow your normal protocols.

If a student is exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness, isolate the child from other students, contact the parents or guardians so the child can be taken home, advise the parents or guardians to contact their health care provider, and remind them to not return to school until their symptoms resolve. We recommend waiting at least 24 hours after the resolution of symptoms without a fever-reducing or symptom-reducing medication. We understand that some schools may require a longer time period before returning.

It's a good time now to identify ways to continue student education if schools close for an extended period of time. This may include take-home lesson plans or web-based instruction if possible.

And work with partners to ensure that social, medical, and meal services will continue for eligible students if schools close and communicate any plans to students, parents, and guardians.

In the case of a potential school exposure at your site, during this time period, your local public health will partner with you and we will assist you with communications. We are very aware of privacy concerns and will protect confidential information.

You might be aware this week that one of the nine Arizona cases is a member of our elementary school community. State and local public health are actively investigating to identify any close contacts that may have been exposed. And we will monitor those contacts for fever and respiratory symptoms.

To give you some background, that individual did not have any symptoms and was not currently symptomatic while they were on campus. And because of that, we believe the risk to that specific school, outside of this individual's close contacts, of getting COVID-19 is very low.

We worked with them and provided recommendations and they proactively implemented school notifications and cleaning and disinfecting of the school grounds.

For further information, we do have a website dedicated to COVID-19 and it's updated daily.

You can find the most up to date information at AZ HEALTH DOT G-O-V SLASH COVID19 (azhealth.gov/COVID19)

It is also recommended that now is a good time to reach out and get to know your local public health partners. You can also contact your Local

Public Health Department. We have a link on our website to find out how to find your local public health department can be found on our website with their contact information, so that you can reach out.

We also yesterday, initiated an Arizona COVID-19 hotline. This is being answered by The Poison and Drug Information Centers in Arizona. They are partnering with public health to answer questions from the public and medical providers.

Thank you for joining us today.

GOVERNOR DUCEY:

Thanks very much, Dr. Christ. Thanks for your commitment to public health and the citizens of Arizona. I know you've been working around the clock on this and I am very grateful.

I also want all our listeners to know that we'll be taking a copy of these comments and posting them on Dr. Christ's website. They'll also be available to superintendent Hoffman if you want to share with anyone else in your orbit about our guidance around public schools and the care of our children. And with that, let's open it up for questions.

Q: Will Arizona be closing schools as we have seen other states do?

GOV DUCEY: Arizona is following the facts and making the best decisions we can for the people of Arizona. We are certainly aware of what is happening in other states. We want to make the best possible decision, and these decisions will continue to be based on the facts and information that we have.

DR. CHRIST: We are continuously monitoring the data and where we have our cases. We currently do not have widespread or a congregate setting

with an outbreak. It's a good time to make sure that your policies and plans are up to date. And we are continuously monitoring that as we get new cases.

Q: Is the average household flu more dangerous than the coronavirus?

DR. CHRIST: There's two factors that we're taking into consideration. So it does spread very similarly to flu, the, the symptoms are very similar, it's difficult to tell the difference. However, with COVID - 19, what we're seeing is a higher infectious rate. So the elderly, which we are seeing, in our 80 years old and older cohort, we are seeing a 15 to 20% mortality rate. And then we've got our high risk groups, as well.

Q: What is your recommendation for this for athletics?

DR CHRIST: At this time, we are not recommending for schools to cancel athletics or interscholastic activities.

Q: There are several charter schools that are on the campuses of community colleges and those community colleges are extending their spring break and considering going online, how would that affect our charter school?

DR. CHRIST: It's not our recommendations to colleges and universities that they close at this time. They are doing that I believe out of an abundance of caution. But that was not public health's recommendation and it is okay to be on campus.

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: We are also not recommending school closures and so the same goes for our charter schools even if they are on a college or university campus.

Q: My question is how will we know when we're regaining or getting control of the virus?

DR. CHRIST: We do anticipate that we will see increased numbers with 2009. What we saw was we saw a small wave of cases that appeared April through around June or July, and then it came back really high in our normal flu season months. So October through April. We'll continue to monitor as we get increased, laboratories being performed, we'll get a better idea of where it is in the community and where we are kind of in the trajectory of our disease.

Q: I was curious if the guidance documents you're going to that you're going to post on the website will address what some of the alternative learning options are going to be.

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: We do not anticipate any disruption to school funding and we will be as flexible as possible and we're working with the State Board of Education and our other partners to ensure that this will not cause any negative impact to things like our accountability system and those types of things.

Q: Do you recommend that we have parents of children who've traveled to some of the targeted areas self quarantine at this time?

DR. CHRIST: What we recommend is if you are returning from one of the areas that the CDC has identified as a travel advisory or a travel risk, public health is getting the names of those individuals and following up with them and asking them to self quarantine.

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: If you have students who are medically fragile or vulnerable and you know you've been in communication with the parents, and they decide to keep their children home, we would just

recommend that schools be flexible and look at all of your options in terms of being able to excuse the absences.

Q: Is there any information out there being sent about the possibility of closing the border yesterday in Douglas, it did shut down for a brief brief moment.

GOVERNOR DUCEY: We have had video conference calls with Vice President Mike Pence, our Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex, Azar and other top health officials in the federal government. That has not been part of discussion at this time.

Q: What about how do we report absences provide support for these families that just opt out of attending school?

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: That'd be up to you all as school leaders that I want to empower you to make those decisions on a case by case basis to be in communication with their families and to again, look at all all your options in terms of excusing, excusing the absences even if you know that they're not vulnerable or medically fragile that it because this is a unique situation.

Q: Since there is such a difficulty for everyone to get a hold of things like Lysol wipes, disinfectants, even toilet paper, is there anything that the schools can do to assure that we have those items in place?

DR. CHRIST: We would recommend if you are short on essential supplies, contact your local public health department because they can elevate potential needs for supplies and we may be able to utilize our emergency management systems to identify how to bulk purchase.

Q: My question is about our classified staff. We have ways to if we have to send everyone home, if that does end up happening, that our certified staff

can work on things at home, and we could continue to pay them but our classified staff only gets paid. If they are here on the days the students are here. And is there any consideration or should that question go to someone else on how we pay and make those people hold or they will not be able to?

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: This is an issue that we will continue to work on as needed with our state leaders in the legislature. And it's also something that I've expressed to our Congress.

Q: The question is that the state or county doesn't close schools, then it doesn't make the call that individual districts will. I'm concerned that that's going to happen, we're gonna have individual districts making the call. My question is, are you concerned, this might exacerbate the situation with a sense of panic or fear?

DR CHRIST: We will be making decisions on school closures using the most current data that we have. And there may be a recommendation if there is a case or an outbreak in a specific school or school district that we would individually close that school or that school district. That is normally done in consultation with the school district and the local health or the local health department.

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: I would just echo the guidance from our department of health services that we want to be making data driven decisions and not panic. We want to be reassuring to our communities, to our parents, to educators, we want to keep people safe and healthy and protect them as best as possible.

Q: Does the warmer weather stop the spread of coronavirus?

DR. CHRIST: We do know that influenza, our season tends to end when it gets warmer, less people are congregating indoors. We do not know what that's going to look like with COVID-19.

Q: One request is that you continue these meetings and if we can include educators inside the classroom, they are going to be answering questions from students and parents. Be robust in the “why” decisions were made. Alhambra is closing all their schools until further notice.

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: That's a great idea and our department can start working on and we can work with Dr. Christ on this of a document that would be a more kid friendly type of document.

Q: We ask the department to start thinking about how the A through F grading men may have to be reassessed when all of this is concluded.

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: We've been working with the vendors around having flexibility around the testing windows, but if necessary, well, we will even be discussing with them if if we have a need for testing waivers that would have a significant impact to our A through F grading system.

Q: Do you have any guidance in terms of student travel out of state?

DR CHRIST: We are not recommending canceling travel plans unless you are going to an area that has a CDC travel advisory.

Q: Will schools be required to make up days at the end of the year

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN: We are going to be as flexible as possible and work with schools on a case by case basis.

Q: I just wanted to know what criteria will be used when recommending school closures.

DR CHRIST: We are working on identifying what the community spread is so the community spread will play a large role if there is widespread sustained community transmission of COVID-19 that will play a role. We would take it on a case by case basis to impact the least amount of students possible.

Q: Could you also then share out what the rationale was maybe in certain circumstances so that we can understand what the circumstances are to see if ours are similar.

DR CHRIST: We are not recommending that mass gatherings are cancelled at this time. We are not recommending that businesses closed at this time. And we are not recommending that school districts closed at this time.

Q: I'm curious to know what your recommendations are about limiting non essential people on our campuses.

DR CHRIST: Continue having volunteers. If the volunteers are high-risk or elderly, or have an underlying medical condition, we would recommend that at this time they do not participate. Shouldn't have volunteers interacting with high risk populations. Volunteers that appear to be symptomatic, send them home.

Q: How will school leaders determine the risk to high-risk students and staff after traveling from states where the virus is currently on the rise but is not currently identified as high risk from CDC?

DR CHRIST: if you have an individual who has traveled, contact your local health department, they should be able to answer your questions.

Q: How do you see the coronavirus impacting the legislature's ability to get the budget through in a timeline?

GOV DUCEY: We are thinking about the fundamentals and the fundamentals, our public health, public education and public safety. We're working with legislative leaders of both parties to make certain that we do the right things for Arizona's in this changing time.

Q: What is Arizona doing when it comes to monitoring people and students who may have traveled recently?

DR CHRIST : There are many proactive steps that we are taking, which is the monitoring of returning travelers from those high risk individuals from those high risk areas.

Q: How do we keep our students safe physically and psychologically? Do you recommend schools be shut down?

DR CHRIST: Our recommendation is to keep life as normal as possible for Arizonans. Things like closures significantly increase trauma and stress that can occur. We are not recommending mass closures at this time.

Q: How much lead time would we have if there's a statewide closure of schools?

GOV DUCEY: If there were a need for schools to close, school leaders would be provided as much lead time as possible. We have to deal with facts as we get them.

Q: Who has the authority to make the decision to close schools on a statewide basis? Why have other states made this decision?

GOV DUCEY: As governor, I would be the one who would make the decision on something like this at a statewide level. I'm going to constantly communicate with SPI, but we are deferring to the medial experts on this.

Q: How do we apply that in a school setting?

DR. CHRIST: There are a lot of strategies you can utilize. We are not recommending social distancing unless you are high risk. That would include any staff or students that have underlying medical conditions or elderly staff. You can cohort by high-risk individuals and make sure they have increased hand washing, you can screen visitors, you can screen students as they come on to campus. We recommend staying about 6 feet away from an individual to avoid spread by respiratory droplet. Ultimate social distance is isolation and quarantine.

GOVERNOR DUCEY:

I want to close by saying a real thanks to Superintendent Hoffman and Director Cara Christ.

Superintendent Hoffman— any closing comments?

SUPERINTENDENT HOFFMAN:

My closing comments would be again to check our website at AZed.gov for that guidance document that will be published by 5:00pm today. And also for our school leaders that we will be offering a webinar from the Department of Education that will be on Tuesday at 2pm and we will be emailing information about that as well.

GOVERNOR DUCEY:

Dr. Christ?

DR.CARA CHRIST

We provided a webinar for educators and school professionals that was video taped and will be placed on our website. I think that was just held yesterday, so that should be up by the beginning of next week. You can feel free if you weren't able to attend, to watch that at any time. If you have questions you can always e-mail us at HEOC@azdhs.gov and one of my team members and subject matter experts will get back to you. But we would also recommend that you reach out to your local public health department. Thank you for joining us

GOVERNOR DUCEY

I want to thank all of our school leaders. We had hundreds of leaders on this call, so thank you for being on the call.

We wanted to update you. These are our latest steps, they're not going to be our last steps.

I think we went nearly 90 minutes and were able to exhaust all questions.

We will put on the website what we talked about today, what the frequently asked questions and answers were as well, so you can share those with parents and leaders in your community

We're going to continue the approach of being calm and steady, but we will have a sense of urgency and the effort will be to protect public health.

We'll be transparent and timely as well.

If there's anyone that has additional issues that we need to be aware of, feel free to go to azhealth.gov for all the latest updates and guidance.

Thank you so much for your partnership in keeping Arizona schools safe and healthy.

Thanks to Superintendent Hoffman and Dr. Kara Christ.

And I know we'll be talking with you soon— be careful out there.

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