RENSSELAER COUNTY DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

Steven F. McLaughlin
County Executive

Mary Fran Wachunas
Public Health Director

March 16, 2020

Dear Residents of Rensselaer County:

Rensselaer County Executive Steve McLaughlin has declared a state of emergency for the County of Rensselaer because public safety is imperiled by the COVID-19 virus. Our County is responding proactively and comprehensively to limit the spread of the virus within the territorial limits of the County and to avoid, if possible, the aggressive spread of the virus that has befallen other jurisdictions.

The COVID-19 outbreak has quickly infected nearly every state in the U.S. and, according to data published by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in a matter of weeks; the virus has spread from roughly 100 people on March 1 to almost 3,300 people by Sunday, March 15. Without a multi-layered response to disease prevention, including social distancing measures, the number of infections and deaths stand to continue to rise.

Given this information and because there have been positive cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in school employees within New York State already, the County Executive and I, in cooperation with the entire Rensselaer County Council of Superintendents, have been engaged in discussions and recommend that as part of a multi-layered approach to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as of March 17, 2020, schools within the territorial limits of Rensselaer County close until April 1st in accordance with New York State Executive Order No. 202.2. This includes all school related activities and athletics. The schools should also be closed to all outside groups who use the school buildings. It is imperative that schools and community centers focus on a deep cleaning and sanitizing of schools and buses.

The Rensselaer County Department of Health has already recommended the complete closure of hospitals and nursing home facilities to visitors. We are now also recommending the closure of community centers and the cancellation of all events or activities with 50 or more people. These measures are necessary to prevent the spread of the virus and are in line with recent guidance issued by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Each local school district will be sharing further information with students and families about continued instruction by no later than this afternoon. It is likely that staff will continue to report to schools, as originally scheduled, for the purposes of planning continued instruction for students and cleaning activities. Families and students should wait for information from their local districts or visit your local district website for updates. For families who will need assistance with meals due to school closures, please contact your school district directly for assistance. The schools will be planning the continuation of grab and go type breakfast and lunch options for students who qualify for meals.

Please know that during this unprecedented time we will stay in close touch with the school superintendents and the entire community. We are planning to provide regular updates as new information becomes available.

For information about how to talk to your child about COVID-19 and other resources related to the pandemic, please call us at 518-270-2655 or visit the following websites: www.cdc.gov, www.rensco.com or www.health.ny.gov.

For other information or resources related to anxiety or mental health issues caused by COVID-19, please contact 518-270-2800 or visit the following websites: www.rensco.com or https://omh.ny.gov/.
The following is information about COVID-19, and guidance on how to protect yourself and others from the virus.

Information about the spread of COVID-19

There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) by the spreading of respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

Take the following steps to protect yourself

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact and certainly avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

How to protect others

- Stay home if you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Immediately after coughing or sneezing, wash your hands with soap and water.
- If you are sick: You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then you should do your best to cover your coughs and sneezes, and people who are caring for you should wear a facemask if they enter your room.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

As the Rensselaer County Department of Health we, along with County Executive Steven McLaughlin place the health and safety of our residents first. We will continue to keep you updated should new information becomes available.

Thank you,

Maryfran Wachunas, CPH
Public Health Director
Rensselaer County Department of Health