March 3, 2020

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

**RE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention, Precautions, and Protocols**

We are all concerned about the coronavirus and remaining healthy. These concerns must be balanced with our unwavering commitment to serve vulnerable families throughout Georgia. That said, we will continue normal operations, focusing on prevention and planning for future developments as they relate to our virus response. We are working closely with other state, local and federal entities to monitor the situation and will provide additional information if and/or when the situation changes.

As we continue to serve Georgia’s families and children, employees are expected to treat constituents with respect; understanding that symptoms commonly associated with coronavirus are similar to those of the common cold. Do not engage in behavior that could be perceived as bigoted or discriminatory in the name of virus avoidance. The best way to protect yourself and others is to implement the same measures you use to avoid any illness.

**General Prevention**

To avoid illnesses or infection:

* Wash your hands often, with soap and warm water, for at least 20 seconds;
* Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
* Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol;
* Try to remain about six feet away from others when possible;
* Cover coughs and sneezes with the sleeve of your shirt, not your hands, and immediately wash your hands thereafter;
* Avoid shaking hands;
* Clean and disinfect surfaces using a disinfectant spray or wipe; and
* Stay home if you feel ill, and encourage your employees, colleagues, and others to stay home if they are experiencing symptoms.

The above recommendations are consistent with those previously communicated both by the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). More importantly, they’re simple things you can do at work and home to reduce the risk of illness.

**DFCS Office Protocols**

Leaders are working with other state and local entities to develop protocols and policies to coordinate our response. Soon, these policies will be communicated at the county level to ensure that all offices are prepared to act in the event of a suspected or confirmed case.

In the interim, please observe the following protocols:

* Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).
* Employees should notify their supervisors and stay home if they are sick.

**For Foster Parents and Caregivers**

Whether you are a foster parent or are caring for your own child, family member, or other member of your household who is ill, please follow these additional procedures:

* Have only people in the home who are essential for providing care for the person. Other household members should stay in another place of residence. If this is not possible, they should stay in another room, or be separated from the patient as much as possible. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
* Restrict visitors who do not have an essential need to be in the home.
* Keep elderly people and those who have compromised immune systems or chronic health conditions away from the person. This includes people with chronic heart, lung or kidney conditions, and diabetes.
* Make sure that shared spaces in the home have good air flow, such as by an air conditioner or an opened window, weather permitting.

Foster parents and relative caregivers are encouraged to check with their primary medical provider in case of an illness in the home, both for treatment recommendations as well as advice on preventing the spread of illness. **Please remember that only certain individuals will be eligible for coronavirus testing.** Testing policies will likely change over the coming weeks, and you should check with your healthcare provider and visit either <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> or <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus> for updated testing information.

If you have a child with a high fever or significant shortness of breath, please contact your primary physician as soon as possible.

**Constituent Calls**

In the coming days, we expect an increase in the number of inquiries surrounding coronavirus. Please refer these parties to CDC and DPH websites at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> or <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>.

Over the next couple of weeks, the DPH will likely be inundated with requests. Please refer constituents to the websites above for regular updates on coronavirus.

Every year we are exposed to a variety of viruses that cause upper-respiratory infections. This coronavirus may be “novel,” but we will use tried and tested techniques to limit its impact on our friends, family, colleagues, and operations. Thank you for doing your part to keep yourself and your neighbors healthy.

Regards,

Tom C. Rawlings

Director