



# The Taft School

January 27, 2020

To all Taft Parents, Students, Faculty and Staff:

We write to offer an update on how Taft is dealing with the coronavirus outbreak and to assure you that we are doing all we can to ensure the health of our community. This virus originated in the city of Wuhan (China) and its presence has been confirmed in a growing number of cities around the world. Coronaviruses are quite common, but the latest strain—the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)—can cause severe respiratory illness. Five cases have been confirmed in the United States.

As we learn more about the coronavirus so much in the news, it is important to note that seasonal influenza is accounting for the increased rates of illness we are seeing at Taft right now. Like many schools, Taft has had a higher than average number of seasonal flu cases this year. The Center for Disease Control reports that every state has seen seasonal flu, the Type A and Type B viruses which routinely spread in people and are responsible for the seasonal flu epidemic each year. As of this writing, we have had 21 confirmed cases of seasonal flu at Taft. All students with confirmed cases of flu have, when at all possible, been sent home. Those who are not able to travel (to date, two students) have been quarantined in our health center. Students with suspected cases of the flu have likewise been sent home or quarantined pending test results.

In order to ensure we at Taft are fully informed, we have followed developments in various media, professional journals, and health organizations. We have communicated with Taft families in China, who have provided valuable perspective. We have closely monitored the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization websites, and we are in regular contact with the Torrington Health District. Further, school physician Dr. Diane Fountas has communicated with colleagues and leaders in Connecticut and with medical experts at several universities, including Dartmouth College and Yale University. We are being advised both by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and also The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS). In short, we are doing all we can to stay informed, to follow the advice of medical experts, and to take steps to keep our campus healthy.

As of this writing, the World Health Organization (WHO) has provided a statement indicating that the 2019-nCoV virus does not constitute a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). According to various sources, the immediate health risk in the United States is low. Most agency guidelines for schools are commonsensical—e.g. exercising basic prevention protocols appropriate to any flu-like virus (washing hands, staying in private quarters if ill, not sharing cups and water bottles, etc.)

Here are the steps we have currently taken or will be taking to help the campus remain healthy:

- We have contacted families in China who had planned campus admissions visits to cancel those visits and to offer Skype interviews. This restriction is in line with guidelines set forth by the Chinese government restricting group travel from China.

- Parents traveling from China and any parent who has recently traveled to China or has been in close contact with anyone who has traveled to China should not attend Family Weekend (February 14-15) unless they have been in the United States for fourteen days and are symptom-free.
- At this time, we are asking that students not travel to China for March break. As always, if you need assistance making alternative plans for your child during the break, please contact the school.
- We have postponed the headmaster and director of development's trip planned for February to China.
- Dr. Diane Fountas has addressed the school on the practical measures to help community health: hand washing, promptly visiting the health center for symptoms of the flu, etc.
- We have posted WHO advice posters to raise awareness about measures to help all community members stay healthy.
- Our housekeeping department has increased the frequency of cleaning in public spaces, including cleaning bathrooms, common rooms, classrooms, and dining halls an additional two to three times per day with cleaners and disinfectants designed to eradicate a wide variety of viruses, including flu.
- Our food service provider, Aramark, is, as always, working closely with the school to ensure food safety.
- With our winter Long Weekend upon us, we are asking parents to help by keeping their children home if they exhibit any flu symptoms, including fever, cough and shortness of breath.
- If a student is home sick, we will require documentation of flu status before the student is permitted to return to campus. If your child is exhibiting flu-like symptoms, please call the health center (860-945-7763) and follow their instructions.

We realize that this is a time of heightened concern for many Taft students and their families, particularly those who will not be able to attend Family Weekend due to these new requirements. As always, the Taft faculty, including advisors, dorm parents, and counselors stand ready to help any students who need additional support.

This is a fluid, evolving situation; and we will continue to monitor reports and provide updates as necessary. Our goal is to not be reactionary or panicked, but to be informed and prepared. We are working to be the community we always strive to be—open, warm, and welcoming of all—even as we also want to do all we can to be safe and healthy.

Thank you for your support as we strive to keep our community healthy.

Regards,

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Headmaster

Diane Fountas, M.D.  
Director, The Martin Health Center