



# The Taft School

January 30, 2020

Dear Taft Parents,

We write on the eve of winter Long Weekend with an update, a comment, and a plea about the seasonal flu and the coronavirus epidemic.

First, as an update, we share that we've worked very hard to do all we can to keep the campus healthy. The challenge is enormous, in part because we are a close community where we interact every hour and on every corner of campus, and in part because this year's seasonal flu is worse than in many years. The Health Center has been, as you would imagine, a very busy place; but we feel we have handled student sickness well. We are well prepared for this type of flu season, and we have good protocols in place to help curb the transmission of viruses. As [we wrote in an email](#) to you earlier this week, our school physician, Dr. Fountas, is in touch daily with infectious disease specialists. It has been very helpful that parents have, whenever possible, followed our recommendation of bringing their child home at the first sign of symptoms. For that, we are grateful. We hope that the many other steps we've taken—speaking to students about common sense health practices, signage in dorms and public places, increased frequency of disinfecting of public spaces, etc.—have helped. Please know that it is not too late to get a flu shot. So, to summarize: this year's flu is worse than in recent years; we've taken all of our normal precautionary steps and a host of out of the ordinary actions; and students and families have been terrific in working with us.

The comment we make is this: Long Weekend is simultaneously exactly what we need and also not what we need! It's what we need because it offers a respite for faculty, students, and staff to get away from campus, take a break from work, and get much needed rest. However, it also means that students in this very diverse school will be traveling all over the globe, in train stations, airports and public spaces of countless cities. Further, many Taft parents generously host students who are friends with their son or daughter. So, Long Weekend means that while we all can get the rest needed, there is also the possibility your child might be exposed to the seasonal flu.

That leads to our plea to you: to help us protect the well-being of our community. Specifically, we ask that if your child or any student you are hosting for the weekend shows any signs of illness (even illness without fever), that they not return to campus until they have been tested for flu. Any student testing positive for influenza should remain off campus for seven days from time of diagnosis and until they are symptom free. As always, please communicate with our Health Center should your child be ill. In accordance with the Center for Disease Control guidelines, we also ask that if any member of the Taft community has travelled to China or been exposed to someone who has travelled to China in the last 14 days and is symptomatic of respiratory illness that they contact our Health Center (860-945-7763). Following these practices can make a profound difference in community health. To the sick child who may be anxious about missing classes, we simply say, "We understand, we will help, and it will be OK." More generally our plea is that you see community health as just that—a community commitment. Taft has always been a close, caring and safe school; and we know we are only those things because everyone is committed to helping. We need everyone's help. Thank you for your understanding.

Finally, we recognize that the combination of the seasonal flu and the coronavirus outbreak is a source of concern for all. There are students worried about their families; there are parents anxious about their children. For many families, especially those who reside in China and Hong Kong, it is not only Long Weekend but also March break which is a source of anxiety. In typical Taft fashion, several families have offered to host students whose plans have been disrupted, and I hope that more will. We are determined that every student here feels cared for.

These past days have been challenging, but the compassion and commitment of so many—from Health Center to dining hall to dorms to athletic center; from faculty, students, staff and parents—has been remarkable. We deeply appreciate the support and cooperation, and we send best wishes for a safe and restful weekend.

Regards,

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Headmaster

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