



The Taft School

February 27, 2020

To Taft Parents, Students, Faculty, and Staff:

We write after a busy and successful winter term and as we head into our March break to share our work around community health and the coronavirus epidemic.

As a global school, with community members from around our interconnected world, we have worked diligently to ensure that our campus is safe and healthy. No goal is more important. We also know that dealing with the coronavirus means encountering dynamic conditions, new information, and changing policies.

To help clarify what we have done and are doing, below we offer Frequently Asked Questions and responses which we hope will be helpful.

What Has Taft Done to Monitor the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Epidemic?

As a school, we have followed the epidemic closely. School Physician Dr. Diane Fountas has worked closely with local, state and national health organizations, monitored the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. State Department, and World Health Organization (WHO) websites, and consulted with leading experts in the state as well as the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). Taft has a very close relationship with our local health district official and has sought information and advice from her. In addition, we have closely followed responses by other schools and universities and participated in a national session on coronavirus preparedness.

Are Students Allowed to Travel Internationally Over March Break?

Parents, of course, have the right to have their children travel where they wish, whether home or elsewhere, though consulting the CDC and State Department for international travel is critical. However, parents should know that the coronavirus epidemic has created a very dynamic landscape, with conditions changing with little notice. It is possible that a student hoping to return to Taft might face travel restrictions or even quarantine on entry into the United States. We simply cannot predict.

What Can Parents Do to Help Taft Remain Healthy?

The most important thing a parent can do is communicate clearly, promptly and honestly with the school. This could involve a student with seasonal flu, a question about travel, or a concern about symptoms. We are all in this together.

Please use common sense if your child has any flu symptoms: seek medical advice and then contact the Health Center. The Health Center will determine whether it is appropriate to return to campus or join a school sponsored spring break trip.

Any parent who has reason to believe their child may have come in contact with someone with coronavirus should contact their doctor and then notify the Taft Health Center (860-945-7763). We would then determine the safest way forward.

How is the School Employing CDC Recommendations to Provide Guidance?

The CDC has an alert system which provides critical guidelines around travel. Those warning levels are:

Warning Level 3

CDC recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel

Alert Level 2

These destinations are experiencing sustained community transmission of respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The virus can spread from person to person. Older adults and those with chronic medical conditions should consider postponing nonessential travel.

Watch Level 1

CDC does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to these destinations. Travelers should practice usual precautions.

Other Destinations with Risk of Community Spread

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected. At this time, the extent of virus spread is not sustained or widespread enough to meet the criteria for a travel health notice.

At this point, any student who travels to a country which is listed as Warning Level 3 (Avoid Non-Essential Travel) or Alert Level 2 (Practice Enhanced Precautions) will be required to provide proof that they were in the United States and symptom free for fourteen days before returning to Taft or joining a Taft-sponsored trip. As of this writing, China and South Korea are listed as Warning Level 3. Japan, Italy and Iran are listed as Alert Level 2.

Countries listed as Watch Level 1 (Practice Usual Precautions) include Hong Kong.

Again, the CDC is continually evaluating these ratings, and these countries could change rating without notice, and new countries could be added. [Warning levels are updated by the CDC on their website.](#)

Taft will continue to regularly consult CDC, State Department, and local health official websites.

For the well-being of the Taft community, we expect transparency from all members of the community and all visitors to campus about any potential exposure to COVID-19 or travel to Warning Level 3 or Alert Level 2 countries.

Does Taft Have Any International Student Trips Planned?

Taft has two trips planned: the Jazz Band in Portugal and a service trip in the Dominican Republic. As of this writing, both trips are scheduled, but we are monitoring both carefully. We will be communicating with families if there are any changes, and families will be told that we cannot predict changes in status of either country and that we cannot control future exit or reentry conditions.

Has the School Supported Students Who Must Be Feeling Stress Over March Break Plans?

We are keenly aware of the anxiety some students are feeling: it's really hard to worry about coronavirus at home, to miss family and not know when you will see them next, or to be unsure about your vacation plans. We have tried to reach out and support students in a variety of ways. International Student Coordinator Courtney Smyth (csmyth@taftschool.org) has worked closely with students to answer questions, help with plans, and offer support—as have deans, advisors and dorm faculty. Numerous families have stepped forward to host students. Students will receive this letter as well, and we encourage them to reach out to any trusted adult.

If a Student Must Be Away from Campus for Fourteen Days, Will Taft Provide Some Educational Programming?

For many years, Taft has had policies and procedures which speak to situations when a student is not able to physically attend class, whether for a relatively short period of time or for a longer period involving a Leave of Absence. If a student, because of travel in a Warning Level 3 or Alert Level 2 country or because of exposure to coronavirus, is required to delay return to campus for fourteen days, the family will be responsible for housing arrangements. However, Taft is prepared to support the students remotely. We will communicate with each student's teachers, class deans, and advisor in the event that they will be away from school. A student will not be penalized for missing school and we will work hard to make sure no student falls behind.

We stress that while this scenario is unlikely, our past experience in helping students who are away from campus will serve us well. And, we want to be very clear: while attending classes is very important at Taft, individual and community health are even more so. We are confident that the student who is away for two weeks will be fine academically.

Will the Adults in the Community Have the Same Expectations About Travel?

Yes. Faculty and staff will have the same expectations around travel, and this document will be shared with the entire community.

Who Should a Parent Call if Their Student Has a Travel Change or Delay?

We know that the coronavirus epidemic is dynamic, and for that reason we cannot predict conditions for reentry into the United States from individual countries. Our hope is that travel into the country will be normal, but if you encounter any issues (flight changes or delays) please contact the school Duty Office at 860-945-7800 or the Campus Safety Office (860-945-7789), which is open 24 hours a day.

What Else Should We Know?

While we hope that the guidelines above are clear, there are scenarios we cannot predict. Taft reserves the right to take whatever measures it deems necessary to ensure the health of the community.

The purpose of this letter is neither to elevate nor to diminish concerns about the coronavirus; it is to *inform*. While our experience with the H1N1 virus in 2009 and the SARS epidemic (which affected 26 nations) in 2003 taught us much, the challenges of COVID-19 are unique. Our purpose is to share what Taft is doing to keep the campus healthy, to provide helpful information about travel, and to affirm that every member of this community has a role in helping. We hope this is helpful, and we greatly appreciate the commitment of everyone as we work to ensure community health. And we wish everyone a safe and restful break!

William R. MacMullen '78, P'14'16
Headmaster

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