MEMO

To: County Employees & Board Members

Date: March 15, 2020

Re: COVID-19 Update

As we are all experiencing, the situation with COVID-19 virus is evolving daily. This is an update letting you know where we are currently with the operation of the County in response to the situation.

First and foremost we continue to encourage employees to follow the general care guidelines as recommended by the CDC. Our best possibility to maintain operations is to minimize opportunities for being exposed to the COVID-19 virus (or any virus for that matter). First and foremost sick employees should not be at work. This cannot be overemphasized. Sick employees should stay home, and we will ask any employees that are sick to leave work until they are healthy.

Continue to practice preventative wellness efforts including:

- Cough and sneeze into your elbow rather than into your hands
- Wash your hands regularly or use hand sanitizer

We recommend you visit CDC for more information about COVID-19 at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html. Here you can find information about the virus, precautions that are being taken and prevention measures that you can take.

Current Status
The County is continuing to conduct business as usual. What that means is we are not closing any offices, we are not limiting public access to any buildings, we are not allowing working from home, and we are not implementing travel bans as of today.

While we continue to conduct business as usual, starting today we will be putting out messaging to the public to discourage visits to the Government Center and other County facilities as part of an effort to practice social distancing. We will be encouraging the public to call ahead to determine if a visit is necessary or to try and conduct business in an other than face-to-face manner. We are also encouraging Departments to reach out to clients, appointments, and potential visitors and try to address matters through phone/email/website whenever possible. For your information - the Rusk County Jail and Animal Shelter are also not open to visitors. Additionally, we encourage County employees to practice social
distancing while at work and in public. The recommendation by the CDC is a separation of at least 6ft., and we encourage you to follow this and limit visits to other offices within your department and in the building.

The school closure has thrown another wrinkle into the situation, but it will not impact our decision on whether we remain operational. Any partial or full closure will be based upon a daily and/or weekly increase of infections, with guidance from State and Local Public Health Officials. We have not changed any policies and are following our current handbook when it comes to sick, vacation, or unpaid leave. Please plan accordingly.

We do understand that the school closure does impact our employees with school age children. Please communicate with your supervisor if you are anticipating issues with child care, as we are reviewing options in regards to this.

The Public Health Department continues to monitor and inform the situation and with their input we continue to update a plan of strategies for a pandemic. The County Board meeting has been moved up one week to tomorrow evening (March 17th). At the meeting the Board will be given an update on the virus and it’s impact to the community and County Government. We will also be discussing with them plans moving forward, and they will act on a resolution granting flexibility in how we conduct operations.

The Buildings and Grounds Department has the proper cleaning supplies on hand and are doing additional cleaning and disinfecting. Even though their staff is doing additional disinfecting, we encourage you to take time to keep your own workspaces clean.

**Travel**

The County is not restricting travel at this time. However, the County recommends Department Heads evaluate with employees the necessity for business travel, and we are discouraging any travel that is not absolutely necessary. Please talk to your department head about any County related travel plans. Many meetings, conferences, and events have already been postponed or canceled and we expect this to continue for the immediate future. The County is continually monitoring and evaluating the guidelines for business and personal travel and may implement future restrictions and actions. At this time if you have had recent or future planned personal travel, we are asking for you to voluntarily disclose details of your travel. This includes the timeframe and destinations traveled through and to. Please include these details in an email to myself and your Supervisor. For the latest information on personal travel, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.

**Plan Ahead**

The situation in front of us changes daily. Due to this, we are highly recommending you continue to assess and plan ahead on a personal level. Also attached are recommendations on what to plan for from the Center for Disease Control.

**Health Insurance (WEA Trust)**

If you are currently a subscriber to our health insurance plan, you should have received information last week provided by WEA Trust that for all members, WEA Trust will waive cost sharing, including copays, coinsurance and deductibles, for the COVID-19 test. They will also not require pre-authorization for medical services related to the testing for COVID-19. Please see [www.weatrust.com](http://www.weatrust.com) for more information from WEA about your coverage.
Realiving (Employee Assistance Program)
Anxiety and stress related to the COVID virus is real, and over the next several weeks, that anxiety and stress will be increased as families are social distanced. As human beings, that interaction with another person is a way we cope. Taking it away might impact you more than they realize. Realiving is putting together a number of things to be supportive of our employees at this time. The first is to provide 24/7 support via our phone line to employees. We’ve always had 24/7 access to a counselor. People tend to think of accessing this support as for urgent personal crisis, but the 24/7 support in this instance is for any type of emotional support. It doesn't have to be an urgent situation, it can be an action taken to insure your own personal wellness.

Any employee that would benefit from a check-in is welcome to call. The Call Center will receive calls and gather information to allow a return call to anyone that wishes to have one. The Call Center can be reached at 877.256.9302. We encourage you to reach out to Realiving to assist you if need be. Their website is also always available at eap.realiving.com – username: RuskCty, password: Ruskemployee. We will pass along additional information from Realiving as it is made available.

Thank you all for your cooperation and support as plans are developed and put in action. Times like this can be stressful, especially when so much of what happens is out of our control. I’m confident that our communication and planning will assist us with whatever comes forward with COVID-19. We have open channels with State and Regional Public Health officials, State officials and local partners, and I am confident that we will navigate the weeks ahead with prudent decision making. Thank you to Public Health, HHS, Schools, Health Providers & Hospital, EMTs, Local Law Enforcement, and other local leaders. All of their work helps community leaders make decisions that are in the best interest of the community. Difficult decisions have already been made, and more are likely to come.

If you have any questions or concerns, I encourage you to contact me.