

# HOT TOPIC #2: MARCH 16<sup>TH</sup>

## SCHOOL IS CLOSED, NOW WHAT?

*COVID-19 updates from San Juan County around subjects on the minds of islanders.*

### HOW ISOLATED DO WE HAVE TO KEEP OUR KIDS NOW THAT SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED?

For this Hot Topic, we reach out to Dr. Frank James, San Juan County Health Officer (and parent!). A few key points from Dr. James:

- First off, I totally empathize with the incredible challenge that the closure of school places on so many families. For some families, there's already a parent at home to care for children, or kids are older so can take care of themselves. But for other families, the loss of the school day can be an incredible logistical, financial, and emotional trial.
- Research has shown that one of the most common ways Coronavirus is spread is within and between families. The intimacy of contact and the duration of contact both make sharing the disease more likely. Now that school is out for at least six weeks, it is time to think about how to manage risks. Playdates, parties, sleep overs, and gatherings with other families should not become the default substitute for school.
- That said, common sense has a place here. Social contact is a key part of mental health, especially for kids, and particularly teenagers. For children that are symptom free and have no underlying conditions, things like bike rides, hikes, and zero physical contact outdoor activity with smaller groups of kids are lower risk than groups of kids having sleepovers, being indoors, eating together, or socializing in large groups. So please, be thoughtful, considerate, use good judgment, and help our children empathize with the importance of this global effort to slow the spread.
- We know this is a huge sacrifice and will make this school closure period much more difficult. But it is really important that we all do everything we can to minimize COVID-19 spread. Remember, the goal here is to protect ourselves (and especially our most vulnerable community members) from the illness, but also to spare our healthcare systems the strain of an enormous surge. That benefits all of us, no matter our age, because all of our regular needs for emergency rooms, physicians, and doctor's offices will continue. This is really important to understand and embrace.
- Schools are closed, but some families have no choice but to rely on solutions outside the home to keep their kids safe. We understand all of this, and here is what we ask:
  1. If you don't need to have your kids in a group setting, don't. Please.
  2. If you do, work to ensure that the group setting has no more than 5 individuals or sets of siblings (since siblings are already connected so closely, they can count as "one").
  3. If kids must gather in a group, please ensure consistency with the make up of the group from day to day and week to week. Please don't mix it up each day, as that defeats the purpose. This includes the adult supervision/teacher.
  4. As always, hand washing, disinfecting, and staying home when sick are absolutely essential.
- Now is a time for families to be together as much as possible. A few rules at home will help, wash your hands as soon as you come in the door, straight to the sink, remind one another that it is for the full 20 seconds! Our family had a talk at dinnertime to make a plan. My wife suggested a bottle of hand

sanitizer right inside the door, my son, immediately said, “We’ll run out too quickly. Why not just all of us wash our hands as soon as we come into the house”. He is also a stickler about how long to scrub, reminding us all it is singing “Happy Birthday TWICE” that counts as long enough to be really clean.

- Even if just your child’s best friend is invited over for a few hours this could undo all the effort made in cancelling school, working from home, rescheduling public events, and so on. Symptoms of coronavirus infection usually take 4-5 days to manifest and people can be infectious even before symptoms develop. Children and adults that come to visit looking healthy can still transmit the disease. Weeks ago we were not sure about this, but now there is a good deal of evidence that people with very mild symptoms or even no symptoms at all do transmit the disease.
- In normal times our social lives are rich, varied, and diverse, but this is no time for pot-lucks. This will eventually be over and we can all make the sacrifice of fun and normalcy for safety during this period of disruption. Together, as a community, we can ‘Flatten the Curve’ and reduce the risk of disease in our community, push the outbreak further into the future so we have more time to prepare and help to make our healthcare system preserve capacity by avoiding a massive number of cases all in a short time.
- Let’s work together to keep our kids, our families and our community safe for everyone! Thank you, truly.