

## Managing Infectious Disease

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Hello, Head Start. I am back with a special vlog for you today. And we're going to talk about health, keeping healthy and keeping well. And before we get started, I always have a love note for you; and today's love note is actually for you. It's for all of you. And I am going to read this this time instead of just free talk because I have very specific message for you and I want to make sure that I don't go off course, which I can do. So you're getting my love note today, and that's because I know it's been a really challenging week. But, you have been champions in your programs and your communities. This demonstration of leadership is commendable and I want you to know it.

In that spirit, I want to reach out to you and not only commend you for the hard work, steadfast leadership, and measured decision-making you've been making, but also to assure you that here at OHS we are here and working hard too for you. I know from where you sit each day, it's not always apparent, but the team here is hard at work trying to make sure you have what you need to do your work, and I want you to know that.

Earlier this week, I pulled together a small team of leadership. We're meeting every morning to assess the current situation. We're looking at updates and considering the impact on our programs, and then we're making decisions about how to go through the day to make sure you're supported. We are vetting communications. We're ensuring you receive up-to-the-minute communication from ACF, from HHS, and the federal government in general, as it's appropriate. But remember that your primary source of information should come from your local sources—local health departments, county organizations, county governments, school systems, states—depending on where you're – where you're positioned. But that's where you should be getting the vast majority of your decision-making information.

Lots of CDC information has gone out. It might feel overwhelming, but the CDC is the expert here. So if you feel like, "Ugh, another link from the CDC," it's okay. Take a breath and then click on it and read it because they have the information that you need and it is invaluable for you to continue leading your own people in a way that ensures their wellness and the wellness of others.

Decision-making is tough. That's what leadership does. If you do not already do so, take advantage of your school system as a guide regarding, say, closure of your program. It's a logical partner in something like this, just as it would be with the inclement weather. School closings can support your program's decision-making. And if it's already your policy to do that, say in inclement weather, remind your parents, your staff, your families that that is your policy so they know to keep an eye out for that. If it isn't already your policy, you might want to consider it at least for this particular situation so that as school systems make decisions, it creates an easier avenue for you to make your own decisions. And it – and it kind of is in line with what the community is doing, and you can communicate that with families and staff as well. Making sure they know that is the most important thing.

And finally, as we adjust to each day and how this issue unfolds, we also keep focused on our mission. Head Start is a vital program to the children and families we serve. Let's keep that in our sight line. Keeping learning rich and engaging, keeping the day as typical as possible. Children and staff really need that consistency. Our staff are vital to that mission, too. Let's keep our staff a priority. Make sure they're well informed, that they see leadership as measured and informed and thoughtful and transparent. All of this will go a long way to support your ability and your staff's ability to work through things. Staying thoughtful and measured is not only good decision-making, it's good for your team and your children and their families. You will set the tone. Keep a positive tone, keep it transparent, keep it thoughtful.

Now, I do want to talk a little bit about health issues, and I brought a friend with me today: Marco. Marco's here. He's my health expert. And how are you?

Dr. Marco Beltran: Hi. I'm great, thank you.

Dr. Bergeron: Good. I reached out to Marco and I said, "Marco, could you put some stuff together? You know, it's winter season; we always try to address flu and flu season and things like that. And of course this year, we've got extra things to think about." And he sent me a bunch of information. I looked at it and I thought, "Oh, this is like the big three. Let's just call it the big three." So we've got three things that I want Marco to go into. One is that you have the power; and number two is review, update, recommunicate; and number three is protecting yourself equals protecting others. So what if we start with number one, with the power piece, Marco; what do you think?

Marco: Great. So I think it's a perfect opportunity for us as health service managers and directors to kind of really refocus and think about what we do in our programs. One of the things that I think is really overpowering for some folks is that they feel that this is any – anytime there's an infectious disease of any sort, they feel like this is the first time they're engaging in it or they're having to deal with it. But we've been through this road before.

Our Performance Standards have helped us develop policies and procedures, resources to help our families, develop materials that are great for them, and address anything related to infectious disease, spread, and/or containment. One of the biggest things that we run across in trying to implement some of these pieces is that people have a lot of fear. And one of the things that we want to refocus on is to take that fear and make it a positive kind of attitude, really feeling like you can control the situation. You have the information that you need and you also have a lot of help that you can rely on to help do some of this work. So always have a positive attitude and knowing that whatever the challenge is, we'll be able to get through it.

Dr. Bergeron: That's kind of like that tone thing we were just talking about, that you're setting the tone and people will follow you based on how you're reacting. Great.

Marco: Right. Yeah. The other thing is, immunize as a first line of defense. I love Head Start programs. Head Start is a phenomenal program. We have some of the highest rates of immunization in the country as it relates to early care and education programs. Continue to encourage folks. We can encourage our parents to make sure that their kids are immunized.

That said, there's other things that can – that you can do as it relates to prevention. And in order to address infectious disease, one of them is to sanitize. Sanitizing is really important. I know all of you have policies and procedures to address this. One is because it's required in many of your licensing requirements.

So, the key is to make sure that you're spraying with the appropriate material or disinfectants and wiping surfaces frequently, especially nowadays; especially with the flu and other viruses that are going around. Make sure that you're really wiping the surfaces more frequently than you usually do. And this is kind of one of those, we often forget because it's so easy and we should be doing it all the time. Handwashing. Handwashing is really important to help us kind of start and get jump-started on this sanitizing process.

Dr. Bergeron: That's great. And you know, I noticed – I was in a store yesterday and I noticed I couldn't find any disinfectant. They're gone. So is there anything people can do if they find your shelves empty?

Marco: So go to the ECLKC, and we have some material around using bleach as a sanitizer and how that can be – how that can be used.

Dr. Bergeron: It's like do it yourself.

Marco: Do it yourself.

Dr. Bergeron: Okay, cool.

Marco: The key and the warning, or the most important thing that we've found out, is that people don't know how to use it. Some of them are using too much bleach. Some of them are using not enough. Some of them are not letting the solution be in a space long enough to be able to do any – any good work that it's supposed to do. So make sure you either go to the ECLKC and also the CDC has an excellent sanitizing, disinfecting page that just went up. Follow their – their procedures. And some of you already have state requirements about how you need to mix the solution, so follow those.

Dr. Bergeron: So a lot of these things are already – actually, all of these things are already in place. It's just a matter of reeducating yourself if it's something you haven't had to do lately. Great. So number two is review, update, and recommunicate in terms of policies and procedures.

Marco: Yes. All of us have policies and procedures. We spend so much time developing our policies and procedures. Many of us hire child care health consultants to come in and develop our health policies and procedures. Make sure that you take an opportunity. I think this is a really good time to really look at those policies and procedures and make sure that you're including stuff related to infectious disease. And think about not just what's happening today, but think about what's happened over the past year. And for some of you, maybe even for the past five years. What are those infectious diseases or things that you've had to deal with over the past several years? And make sure that you have plans for those. And if you don't, this is a good opportunity to start thinking about how you develop that.

Dr. Bergeron: Yep, that's great. And then communicating that out, right? Making sure it's clear to everybody. You may have hired new staff—maybe they aren't familiar—or a substitute teacher, something like that.

Marco: Exactly, and also commuting stuff out to parents. It's really important that our parents know what our policies and procedures are related to health. There's nothing more troubling to a parent. To – to get a note or to get something and then realizing and saying, "I don't understand. Where's this coming from?" So it's important that they have all the information, as well.

Dr. Bergeron: You know what's really cool about that too, related to Head Start, is we're such good supporters of families. It's just another way that we educate our families. And it's good practice for life. So it's great. Fantastic. And then the last one is protecting yourself equals protecting others. Talk about that.

Marco: So. It's, if you protect yourself, you're more likely to protect those in your household, you're more likely to protect those in your classroom because you're taking all those preventative measures or preventative steps to not be exposed to certain things. And by that, you're not carrying it somewhere else.

So, key pieces—if you allow me—to how do you do that for yourself is handwashing. Once again, handwashing is super, super important. Wash your hands. There's – there's different techniques out there. People tell you different things. Sing "Happy Birthday" twice. Sing "Come On, Eileen" is a new one that I just heard, which is – which would be great if I knew the words, but I always get the words wrong. [Laughter] But at least, you know, wash your hands; scrub vigorously for about 20 seconds. But, most importantly, wash after using the restroom, before eating, after coming in contact with fluids, or using a tissue, for example. Always throw away your tissue. A lot of us for...

Dr. Bergeron: Just carry it around.

Marco: Just this really bad habit of, like, using our tissue, putting it in our pocket, and then reusing it and then put it in our pocket. So use it, throw it away.

Dr. Bergeron: I think I might be guilty of that. I'm going to have to think about that one. Yeah, I really need you to remember that. And you know, Head Starts are full of opportunities to come in contact with fluids. I mean, we have little kids. They have runny noses. We change diapers. We help prepare food. I mean, so much to think about. It's different than if you're a, I don't know, ninth grade algebra teacher and you don't ever really have to come in contact with students in such a close range. Yeah. So be really thoughtful about that.

And you know, the last thing on that: stay home if you're sick. It's – you know, we all want to be heroes and plow through. And we want to, well – you know, we know that if we don't show up, the job doesn't get done quite as well. And I really, I used to tell teachers that if you're not here, I know your children aren't going to make as much progress as if you are here—and I believe that's true—but we're better off taking care of the health of everybody and just stay home and get better.

Don't forget that we have got the General Disaster Recovery Flexibilities IM. The link is on ECLKC. Please look it up. Please use it. We're getting a lot of questions. The answers are right here. People are concerned. What if we have to close? What about enrollment? What about attendance? We're going to be flexible guys. We want your kids to be healthy. We want you to be healthy. We know that if – if the school system closes and it's your policy to close if the school system closes, you might be closed for a week.

We would encourage you to make sure your teachers are calling their families and making sure they're okay. They can still do check-ins. They can do some lesson planning. They can do all kinds of things from home. But we don't want you to feel like you're in a little box and you have no ability to be a true leader. And a true leader has to make decisions. Please feel empowered to make decisions using the IM as a guidance. Certainly if you do have questions, you can reach out to your program specialists. But – but we trust you. You run a program that's really important and we want you to feel like you have the knowledge base, the understanding of your locality that I could never have to make a good decision. And then if you need support, let us know. Health first, I think would be the bottom line; right? Can't learn if you're not healthy.

Marco: Yeah, I agree. School readiness starts with health.

Dr. Bergeron: That's right. Well, thank you very much for joining me, Marco. And remember, Head Start is access to the American dream. Go make dreams happen.