

UPDATE 5/26/20

Dear Youth Exchange Families:

Over the past weeks we have been in close contact with students, families, schools and Rotarians across the district and around the world. We have talked to our international exchange partners and Rotary International.

The Rotary International (RI) board is meeting the last week in June to do a risk assessment on Rotary Youth Exchange for the 2020-21 year. At this point, it appears as though the RI board might suspend Youth Exchange until a vaccine is available, so we are postponing our final decision until after the RI board meets.

We fervently believe in this program and the benefits it conveys on young people, their families, and the movement towards peace in the world. As we consider the feasibility of holding exchanges in 2020-21, we see some specific conditions that must be met:

- Borders are open and travel restrictions have been lifted.
- Visas are being issued and can be obtained in a timely manner.
- Schools are in session and able to accept students here and abroad
- Management of COVID-19 is improved, with a vaccine, and/or effective treatment, and/or broad testing and containment
- Medical systems are stable and care is available in our area and abroad.
- Partner districts are available to exchange with.
- Rotary Clubs and host families are still willing to host.
- Our students still want to go on exchange.

We want to be optimistic, but we also need to be realistic, and fair. Some students and families are willing to continue on a tentative basis, with the hope that a shortened exchange may happen in the first half of 2021.

Others would prefer the relative certainty of postponing their exchange to the following year, if possible. One of the factors to consider is that some students will graduate in 2021 if they don't go on exchange, and their age may be a barrier, although, where possible, some districts may relax those conditions.

Because of these factors, our (proposed) plan forward as of May 31 is as follows:

- There will be no departures in August/ September (impossible)
- There will be no full year exchanges for 2020/2021
- January-December 2021 (full year, 2 semesters) is not an option due to the complications of overlapping school years and vacation periods.
- We will continue to explore the possibility of partial year (one semester) exchanges that could start in January or February. The viability of partial year exchanges is still contingent on all the above conditions being met.

- Outbound Students who will be too old to go on exchange in 2021-2022 will be offered a single semester exchange starting in January/February 2021, if world conditions permit exchanges to take place.
- All other Outbound Students will not be eligible for a single semester exchange this year, but will have the option to exchange in 2021-22 if world conditions permit. Again, we can not guarantee where that exchange will be, nor can we anticipate which countries will be available.

Sadly, we know that this disruption is disappointing and the necessary change in plans may stop you from participating in the Rotary Youth Exchange program. In addition to your health and safety being our number one concern, there are real barriers to travel and exchanges right now that we can't yet overcome. We are committed to reviving this valuable and rewarding program as quickly as possible, and those of you who choose to stick with us will have an interesting ride. We will continue to involve you in Rotary and Youth Exchange activities as you wait for your exchange to be arranged.

At this time, we ask that you contact your country officer and ensure that they know your plans. That way we can keep in contact and work together on alternatives and opportunities if they become available. You should also ensure that you have made plans with your high school for fall enrolment.

If you have further questions please contact the program Chair for 2020-21, Mike Cloutier. [edpeetnik@gmail.com](mailto:edpeetnik@gmail.com) or [1 \(510\) 912-7523](tel:15109127523).

Yours in Rotary Service,  
Mike Cloutier

## Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update (05/03/20)

The district youth exchange committee has had several meetings on COVID-19 and the impact it is having on the lives of our Youth Exchange family. We have heard questions and concerns from many students, families, clubs, and Rotarians. Many are worried about finances. Without a vaccine, there are questions about when any of us will be able to travel. We are all anxiously awaiting positive news and direction from our health authorities and governments, that will guide us toward a return to our new 'normal' habits and livelihoods. These concerns are not being taken lightly by the district youth exchange committee as we investigate the options which are available for the program as we head into the 2020-21 Rotary year.

As a district, we have canceled the short-term summer exchange program (STEP) for 2020 as the departure dates would have been too early. The students, families, and clubs involved in this program have all been informed. We will, of course, welcome these students back again next year, if they are interested and fall within the age requirements.

We have set May 31<sup>st</sup> as a deadline to make a decision about whether it is safe to send students on long term (LTEP) academic year exchanges as planned. We feel that by the end of May we will have the information we need to make an informed decision. A variety of options are being considered and the decision will be based on many factors. If the virus outlook and travel restrictions suggest that it would not be prudent to send and receive students for a full year, we will then review whether alternative programs might be possible. This could include one semester exchanges, summer exchanges, or a complete suspension of the program for a year.

The youth exchange program is a complex one that involves a partnership comprised of many individuals, clubs, school districts, and governments. Members of our district youth exchange team are in regular contact with the students, families, clubs and our global partners to get feedback and commentary on what they are experiencing and planning. We are working in concert with Rotarians worldwide to ensure open communication while protecting our youth.

We want to ensure that this important peacebuilding program will not only survive but will thrive post-COVID-19. Our update on the Long Term Program for 2020-21 will be communicated and posted here on May 31.

If you are a current or future exchange student and you have any questions, we encourage you to reach out to your Country Officer. If you have general questions about the program please contact the Rotary Youth Exchange Chair for 2020-21, Mike Cloutier.

Links to our email addresses can be found here: <https://rye5020.org/100792/Page/Show?ClassCode=Page&Slug=district-committee>

On behalf of the District 5020 Youth Exchange Committee, thank you for your commitment to Rotary Youth Exchange!

## Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update (04/08/20)

Our committee continues to work with our partners around the world to monitor changes and work with students and families to address their needs. Some students have returned home while others have chosen to stay in place. We know many of you have questions about the future and the impacts on exchange. I can tell you our committee is in constant communication having ongoing discussions to determine the best course of action for all concerned. On April 6, 2020, our committee met to deal specifically with issues arising because of the virus and determine a plan going forward for programs during the Rotary year of 2020-2021. Here are the outcomes of that meeting:

- The short term program (STEP) is cancelled for 2020
- We will be working out details for those who would still like to plan to go on STEP in summer 2021 and advise shortly
- We are presently looking at options for the long term program (LTEP) for 2020-2021
- We are working with our partner districts around the world on our options
- We are also working with Rotary International, Wessex (Western States Student Exchange) and NAYEN (North American Youth Exchange Network) for consistency
- We have established May 31, 2020 as our cut-off date at which time we will have a decision for long term exchange
- We are developing plans for reaching out to our students who have had to come home early due to COVID-19
- We will be developing plans for our rebound students which we will announce soon.
- We will be reaching out to our key groups, i.e.: Students, parents, and clubs for feedback on their desire and capacity to participate in Long Term Youth Exchange in 2020-21
- We will be developing a series of communications to deal with various aspects of this situation and the future exchange programs

We want to thank all of you for your patience and support as we try to manage through this issue. Please let us know if you need anything specific and we will try to address it either privately or through our communications.

**Ron “Fish” Fisher Chair District 5020 RYE on behalf of the team**

## Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update (03/22/20)

### Rotary District 5020 COVID-19 Update (3/22/20) - For Inbound Students and their Host Families

The situation with COVID-19 continues to be serious and both the US and Canadian governments continue to make restrictions in order to prevent the virus to spread. It is extremely important that you follow the advice given by the authorities.

- Under these circumstances, the travel rules for exchange students are now restricted
  - You may not travel to meet other exchange students or friends
- Until further advised, ***social distancing is still required*** and you should stay at home with your host family.
- During that time please help support your host family in keeping everyone safe and healthy by helping out and washing your hands frequently, etc.

Rotary District 5020 has the safety and well-being of the exchange students and the people involved in the program as our first priority. To that end, we believe, based on the information available, that most of you should stay in place, at your host family's residence. There is a significant risk in traveling on airports and through airports.

Rest assured that we will assist students and families, whatever decision is made, in whatever way we can during this situation.

## Rotary District 5020 COVID-19 Update (3/17/20)

Dear members of our District 5020 Rotary family:

I am writing to you because of the present situation involving COVID-19. We know you must be concerned for the safety of your students and their families given the circumstances.

Our students' safety is of the highest importance to us and we have been meeting daily as we monitor information from government and health authorities in order to make sound decisions, to minimize risk to all concerned.

As an international district we are focusing on what is happening in both the US and Canada, particularly with British Columbia and Washington State. Given our program extends all around the world we are also monitoring all the countries in which we have students on exchange as well as those countries that our inbounds are from.

Earlier in the week, we shared a message from Rotary International and a message from It's Your World Travel, both have been included below as they are relevant to the situation at present:

Here is the status in District 5020:

- Both the US and Canadian governments advise avoiding all non-essential travel outside of our respective countries and both are also now suggesting the same for travel within country as well.
- As of March 16, 2020 there are 103 cases reported in BC (41% increase in 2 days) with 8 of those on Vancouver Island.
- As of March 16, 2020 Washington Department of Health reported 904 cases (also 41% higher in 2 days), concentrated around Seattle.
- International flights are being suspended in many parts of the world and airlines are reducing or shutting down flights.
- Washington State schools are closed until April 24th; some school districts on Vancouver Island have declared that the March break will be extended by two weeks.
- More and more employers are looking at having employees work from home, closing the business, or operating it with limited public contact.
- Our Outbound Orientation scheduled for next week has been shifted to a web-based format from an in-person conference in Victoria BC
- Both Washington state and British Columbia have advised that there are to be no conferences and gatherings of more than 50 persons until further notice and that may well be revised at any moment
- District 5020 Country Officers are communicating with our exchange partners to check on the status of those countries and our students
- We have stopped all unnecessary travel within Canada and the United States. This means that we will not be approving any new travel request forms at this time and have cancelled any previous travel requests from students.
- We encourage everyone to stay informed and practice risk reduction.

We recognize many of you may wish to bring your students home, or alternatively send your Inbound back to their home country. We ask you consider the following when making these determinations:

- Given closing borders and airlines you may not be able to get them home
- A student that is infected on the way home may show no symptoms but may infect others and thereby introduce the disease into a new population
- If an infected student should show symptoms somewhere along the way, they may be quarantined for a period of time, wherever that may be
- A missed connection may leave students stranded somewhere, unattended in a foreign country and without any local contacts

The travel company that our district works with, It's Your World Travel (IYWT), recommends leaving students where they are because it is becoming increasingly difficult to get students home. Travel increases the risk of spread of the virus. The reality is everyone is safest to stay where they are, practice good hygiene and social distancing. This is how we will help "flatten the curve", and keep this disease from overwhelming our health care system.

We understand that each family's situation is unique, and some will decide to bring their son or daughter home. That is their right, and we will do what we can to help and be of guidance. Some Outbound students are being sent home by their host districts. Again, we don't agree that is prudent, but we will work to ensure that our student gets home safely. We are facing an extremely challenging time, but together we will manage.

Yours in Rotary,

**Ron "Fish" Fisher on behalf of the RYE D5020 team**