

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