March 13, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Late this afternoon, Massachusetts Public Schools in Merrimack Valley and Northshore made a decision to close due to the CDC’s guidelines on social distancing to slow the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). In addition, several MA adult residential providers have decided not to allow their individuals into group day program settings. Due to these developments, as well as Melmark’s own initiatives to ensure social distancing to keep the children and adults we serve safe and healthy, Melmark New England is closing all children’s and adult day programs for the next two weeks.

Families of those individuals who live in a Melmark residence will be contacted by MNE staff to inquire about their ability to take their loved one home for the next two weeks. While we are not currently closing our residential program, we will use the information assessed during these calls to prepare in the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 within our programs.

If families choose to take their loved ones home, they should limit outings as well as visitors to their residence. Families should also check for any symptoms before returning to Melmark New England. Please report any concerns of illness immediately and do not return anyone to MNE programs who has an illness.

We ask that families limit visits to MNE’s residential program and that they consider having only one family member in their loved one’s residence at a time. Those who do visit will be screened upon arrival. Anyone with symptoms consistent with those related to COVID-19 (fever of 100.4 degrees or more, cough and shortness of breath) will not be allowed access the residence. Anyone who has traveled to a CDC Level 3 area within the past 14 days will be asked to refrain from visiting until the CDC’s suggested self-quarantine period has been met. We strongly encourage families to schedule Facetime or Skype video calls whenever possible.

According to the CDC, social distancing and thorough handwashing are two of the top preventative measures to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19. Due to the preventative measures being taken at Melmark, there are no suspected cases of COVID-19 (individuals served or staff) within Melmark’s programs. Below are a few of the ways our staff are being hyper-vigilant to keep those we serve healthy:

- Community outings have been limited to smaller groups visiting parks, where there are fewer surfaces with which to come into contact.
- Melmark’s healthcare team is encouraging telehealth options when non-urgent medical issues arise. This allows the children and adults we serve to avoid going into a doctor’s office or medical center where there is increased exposure risk.
• All meetings, between staff, external parties and families, are being rescheduled when possible. For those that must take place, video and telephone conferencing are replacing in-person meetings.

• During any in-person gathering, staff are being instructed to sit at least six feet apart.

• All non-essential travel for employees is on hold. This includes travel to conferences and presentations.

• All staff are remaining vigilant in the adherence to the health and safety protocols already put in place to ensure the well-being of those we serve as well as our staff.

• We are retraining all staff in our usual infectious disease procedures and updating them on the specifics of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

• Proper handwashing (20 seconds with soap and water) is being maintained and monitored throughout program areas.

• The school, day program areas and residences will be thoroughly cleaned on a daily basis.

• Our program facilities staff are cleaning areas with the CDC-recommended bleach solution to kill the virus if it were to appear on any surfaces within program and administrative areas.

• We ask that staff who have respiratory illness stay at home.

• Staff are discouraged from taking vacation or visiting CDC Level 3 areas regarding non-essential travel. If staff visit a highly infected area, we will assess whether that individuals should return to work or wait until the incubation period for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has passed, utilizing sick and vacation time during the incubation period.

• Our facilities team and other staff have worked to ensure ample amounts of product necessary to the care of those we serve are in place. This includes everything from toiletries to food items.

Healthcare team members are working with leadership to closely monitor all news surrounding these illnesses and best practices to avoid transmission. We will continue to update you as the situation evolves.

Below, you will find more information and best practices from the CDC:

**COVID-19 Symptoms**
Symptoms of COVID-19 may include: fever (over 100.4 degrees F.), feverishness, cough, sore throat, runny nose or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced, including: shortness of breath, muscle pain, fatigue and, in a very small percentage of patients, vomiting or diarrhea.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is attached. This is consistent with our longstanding policy regarding the care of ill individuals.

**What should you do if your loved one is sick?**
COVID-19 and Flu spread easily. If you think your loved one shows signs of either virus, it is very important that he/she does not go to anywhere they might make other people sick, such as group childcare, after school programs, the mall or sporting events. The Centers for Disease

If an individual comes to Melmark with a respiratory illness, we will immediately contact the parents, guardian or provider to immediately pick up the child. Until the individual is picked up, he/she will be separated from the rest of the population to help ensure no one else gets sick. Melmark will collaborate with parents of the individuals who are capable of being cared for in the family home.

**What can you do to keep my loved one from getting sick?**

It is also important to teach your loved one how to reduce the risk of getting either virus and how to protect others from becoming infected.

- Wash hands often using the five steps below:
  1. **Wet** hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
  2. **Lather** hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails.
  3. **Scrub** hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
  4. **Rinse** hands well under clean, running water.
  5. **Dry** hands using a clean towel or air dry them.
- Teach your loved one the proper use of hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly.
- Teach them to cough or sneeze into their sleeve – not their hands! Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. They should wash their hands after blowing their nose or coughing into a tissue. We realize this may be difficult to teach some individuals, but attempts should be made if possible.
- Teach your loved one to avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes. They should keep their hands away from their face. Again, we realize this may be difficult to teach, but attempts should be made if possible.

If we all practice good hygiene, health officials believe we can limit the spread of Coronavirus and Flu in our community.

**Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19**

**How can I keep track of what is going on in my community?**

Please stay informed by getting up-to-date information on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and what you can do to keep your family healthy from your state’s Department of Health at:


or the national Centers for Disease Control website at:
Best Practices
Attached is a fact sheet regarding Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and best practices regarding the reduction of disease transmission. We strongly encourage everyone to follow the precautions outlined in this information. Posters regarding the prevention of disease transmission are being posted in the school, day program and residences.

We are participating on every state regulatory phone call and webinar and implementing any additional measures daily. We are meeting weekly with the Medical COVID-19 subcommittee and reviewing all procedures.

What’s Next?
This is an evolving situation and recommendations from state and federal agencies may change as more information becomes available. We are keeping track of information relating to this outbreak and will keep in close communication with you.

We are taking this information seriously, but remember those protocols are always in place to safely serve all members of the Melmark community.

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping everyone healthy.

Sincerely,

Helena Maguire, M.S., LABA, BCBA
Executive Director, Melmark New England
Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19