MEDIA RELEASE
MARCH 13, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(FORT DODGE) – Webster County leaders are encouraging residents to take personal responsibility by employing social distancing and avoiding group gatherings for the next two weeks due to the potential of coronavirus (COVID-19).

No known cases of COVID-19 have been reported by Webster County Public Health as of the afternoon of Friday, March 13, 2020.

“In light of the concerns surrounding the coronavirus, it is important to note that Webster County and Fort Dodge do not currently have any confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19),” said Fort Dodge Mayor Matt Bemrich. “Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate the need to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of transmission of all illnesses including COVID-19. We are recommending that Webster County residents consider social distancing by making responsible, personal decisions when considering attending or hosting group gatherings for a period of two weeks with the hope of preventing the potential for COVID-19. We are not currently requiring that community events be cancelled, but instead ask citizens to use reasonable considerations when attending or hosting an event for the good of yourself and our community’s health.”

“We have met with city and county leaders from multiple agencies and believe that although there have been no cases of COVID-19 in our county, it is important for our communities to be proactive and take the necessary precautions to minimize the risk,” said Kari Prescott, director of Webster County Public Health. “Our top priority is to protect the health and safety of all who live, work, and visit Webster County.”

What does this look like for Webster County?

Webster County school districts will remain open until guidance is given by the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Iowa Central Community College has temporarily moved all classes to remote delivery for the time beginning March 25-April 3. High school and early bird classes will continue and career academies will remain open. Iowa Central campus will remain open during this time.

Webster County residents should not see a disruption of county or City of Fort Dodge services. Police and fire departments have instituted policies for responding to calls. E-911 dispatchers are also asking additional screening questions at the time of emergency calls.

Employers are encouraged to begin planning for employee staffing and sick leave should COVID-19 cases be reported in Webster County.
As per recommendations from the federal government and CDC, all area long term care facilities have limited visitors.

**What does social distancing mean for Webster County residents?**

Social distancing is the conscious effort to reduce close contact between people and hopefully stymie community transmission of COVID-19. This means using personal responsibility to stay home when sick and to consider not attending events where many people will be in attendance and where germs could easily spread. Social distancing does not mean that residents are quarantined inside of their homes and are unable to leave.

Webster County Public Health Department has established a web page with factual and scientific information regarding coronavirus and Webster County. Residents are encouraged to utilize this information and to not panic or spread false rumors. The web page can be found at: webstercountyia.org/covid19

Any resident who has concerns about COVID-19 can contact Webster County Public Health Department on the COVID-19 hotline at 515-227-7153 or via email at WebCoCOVID@webstercountyia.org Residents who believe they may have or have been exposed to coronavirus should call their doctor’s office first before coming into the clinic.