March 7, 2020

Update about National EHDI Meeting and COVID-19

- The National EHDI Meeting will be held in Kansas City from March 7-11, 2020. Additional attendees are continuing to register every day (currently almost 1,000 people) and none of the exhibitors have canceled.

- The National Meeting started today (Saturday) and is off to a great start.
  - The Linguistic Genius of Babies workshop with Patricia Kuhl was attended by over 160 people
  - 23 people from the Islands and Outlying Territories attended a Saturday afternoon session
  - The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing (JCIH) and the DSHPSHWA Board of Directors met.
  - Project officers and staff from MCHB and the CDC are in attendance.

- Conference organizers will continue to monitor information about the spread and containment of COVID-19 so we can make any necessary adjustments to ensure the safety and well-being of our attendees.

- Some media outlets are reporting that CDC has recommended that people over age 60 not travel on airplanes. We have not been able to find that recommendation on the CDC website. Here is what we did find at [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html)
  - Older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart, lung or kidney disease seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness. Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness. This may be because:
    - As people age, their immune systems change, making it harder for their body to fight off diseases and infection.
    - Many older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions that make it harder to cope with and recover from illness.

  *What to do if you are at higher risk:*
    - Stay at home as much as possible.
    - Make sure you have access to several weeks of medications and supplies in case you need to stay home for prolonged periods of time.
    - When you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often.
    - Avoid crowds.
    - Stay up to date on [CDC Travel Health Notices](https://www.cdc.gov/travel/).  

Please consider the information from CDC carefully as you make your travel plans.

- No cases of COVID-19 have been reported in [Missouri or Kansas](https://www.cdc.gov/), where the EHDI Meeting is being held.
What EHDI-Organizers are Doing to Protect Attendees

As all EHDI Meeting participants know, we are in the midst of an expanding global coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19). The conference organizers extend our sympathies and messages of support to all of those who have been affected by the outbreak. To protect the health and well-being of attendees:

- The Sheraton Kansas City Hotel at Crown Center will be cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces such as the reception desk, door handles, elevator buttons, handrails, etc. every 30-60 minutes during the day.
- Extra hand sanitizers and boxes of tissues will be available throughout the venue.
- Microphones and podiums will be sani-wiped after every session.
- Extra trash bins will be set throughout the venue.
- Large infographics will be posted throughout the venue with suggestions and instructions about what you can personally do to prevent respiratory infections (like colds, flu, or coronavirus) as described below.
- The hotel will ensure that all bathrooms are always stocked with plenty of soap and towels to enable frequent hand-washing.
- We have made the venue a “hand-shake free zone” for this meeting. We encourage you to greet friends and colleagues with smiles. Elbow or shoulder bumps are preferred if other greetings are desired.
- Attendees are encouraged to use the Attendify APP to exchange contact information rather than exchanging business cards.

Personal Protective Precautions for All EHDI Attendees

Attendees should follow standard infection control recommendations and everyday preventive actions to prevent the spread of respiratory infections.

- Face masks are useful for health workers and persons who are ill. CDC does not recommend use of face masks for people who are well as a means to protect themselves from respiratory diseases.
- Avoid close personal contact such as handshakes, hugs, or kisses; elbow or shoulder bumps are preferred if a greeting is desired.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water regularly (with attention to between fingers and under fingernails), scrubbing for at least 20-30 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Although supplies are very limited throughout the US, we have secured enough that there will be pump bottles in every session room, dispensers scatter throughout the venue, and personal bottles of sanitizer available at the registration desk. You are also encouraged to bring your own personal supply.
- Avoid touching face, eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue, forearm/elbow, or shirt sleeve, and wash hands ASAP after a cough or sneeze; dispose of used tissue immediately.
• Use napkins and wax paper sheets to pick up food items for group breakfasts, coffee breaks, and afternoon snacks. If you touch an item, take it—do NOT put it back on the table.

• Stay home if you are ill.

**What to Do If You Have Symptoms (Cough and Fever)**

• If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection before the EHDI Meeting starts, do NOT attend the EHDI Meeting.

• If you develop symptoms of a respiratory infection during the EHDI Meeting, please self-isolate by going to your hotel room or going home if you live in the Kansas City Area. A few N-95 face masks are available at the registration desk for people who become ill during the conference and want to wear a mask on their trip home. Remember, CDC advises that people who are well should not wear face masks.

• Staff at the EHDI Registration desk will have current information about how to obtain timely medical help for people who need it during the conference.

**Informed and Prepared**

Remember that influenza (commonly referred to as the flu) is still a far bigger threat in the US than coronavirus. Every year in the US, the flu infects 10-50 million people and more than 30,000 people die from complications associated with the flu (the number fluctuates some from year to year - data are available [here](#)). By contrast, CDC reports that the number of coronavirus cases in the US is rising but it is still only about 400 as of March 7 and only 19 people have died. Fortunately, the very same preventive measures for reducing the spread of coronavirus, will also reduce the spread of the flu.

EHDI organizers are committed to ensuring our response to concerns about COVID-19 is responsibly based in facts, not driven by fear. Following are important and helpful resources to monitor as you finalize your travel plans for Kansas City.

• [Daily Situation Reports from the World Health Organization (WHO)](#)
• [Prevention and Treatment of COVID-19 – CDC](#)
• [Guarding Against Stigma Related to Coronavirus – CDC](#)
• [Information for Travelers – CDC](#)
• [Interim Guidance Regarding Large Community Events – CDC](#)
• [Coronavirus: Information from HRSA/MCHB](#)

On March 3rd we found websites for 51 conferences being held in the US between March 1 and April 15, 2020. As of March 6, seven of those conferences had been canceled or postponed. All of those were scheduled in states with confirmed COVID-19 cases, six had a significant number of international attendees, and one was a very small meeting of university faculty and students. The EHDI Meeting has no international registrants. The list of conferences, showing which ones have been canceled or postponed is available [here](#).

As new information emerges, please remember that the risk of COVID-19 is not connected with race, ethnicity, or nationality. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin. Sharing accurate information from only reliable sources is the best thing community members can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.