



## New Jersey Department of Health COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care and K-12 Schools

March 2, 2020

Many childcare centers, school administrators, teachers and parents within New Jersey are concerned about how the current outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) will impact their communities and wish to take appropriate steps to mitigate any risks. The word “novel” means new. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working hard to learn as much as possible about this new virus so that they can better understand how it spreads and its associated illness. The New Jersey Department of Health is also working hard by developing guidance and education materials should this new virus impact our residents.

Imported cases of COVID-19 in travelers have been detected in the United States. More cases are likely to be identified in the coming days, including more cases in the United States. It’s likely that person-to-person spread will continue to occur, including in the United States. Widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the United States would translate into large numbers of people needing medical care at the same time. Schools, childcare centers, workplaces, and other places for mass gatherings may experience more absenteeism. Public health and healthcare systems may become overloaded, with elevated rates of hospitalizations and deaths. Other critical infrastructure, such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and transportation industry may also be affected. Health care providers and hospitals may be overwhelmed. At this time, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19 and no medications approved to treat it. Personal protective measures including good hygiene habits and use of [nonpharmaceutical interventions](#) will be the most important response strategy.

Though the CDC considers COVID-19 to be a serious public health concern based on current information, the immediate health risk to the general U.S. public is considered low at this time. The CDC and the World Health Organization are closely monitoring the national and global situation and providing ongoing guidance. At this time, the CDC recommends avoiding nonessential travel to China, Iran, Italy and South Korea. There are additional countries with travel alerts. Updated travel information specific to COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

### **What is the difference between seasonal and novel coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses and there are different types of coronavirus within that family, much like there are different types of influenza viruses. Coronaviruses in general are not new and are a frequent cause of respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Coronaviruses tend to circulate in the fall and winter months, similar to influenza. Most people get infected with these viruses at some point in their lives.

The type of coronavirus that has recently emerged in Wuhan, China is a **new type** of coronavirus and is infecting people for the first time (which means that people do not have any immunity to it). This newly discovered virus is called SARS-CoV-2 and is causing a disease named COVID-19.



## **What are common symptoms of COVID-19?**

Information to date suggests this virus is causing symptoms consistent with a respiratory illness such as cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

## **How is COVID-19 spread?**

At this time, it's unclear how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people. Typically, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest). Chinese officials report that sustained person-to-person spread in the community is occurring in China. Similar spread has been reported in other countries. Person-to-person spread in the United States has been detected but the risk to the general public remains low. Cases in healthcare settings, like hospitals, may also occur.

## **What measures can be taken to prevent COVID-19?**

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses.

## **How is COVID-19 treated?**

Currently, there is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for the coronavirus. There is no vaccine to prevent this virus, and the CDC advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

## **How should schools prepare for the potential of a coronavirus outbreak in their community?**

To prepare for possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for schools to do now is **plan** and **prepare**. Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>.

- Review and update or develop your outbreak response/pandemic plan and share with stakeholders before an outbreak occurs.
- Establish procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible.
- Prepare for the potential of school closures or dismissals or cancellation of school events.
- Prepare to offer home instruction to students.
- Implement flexible attendance and sick leave policies.
- Establish relationships with local public health officials and identify points of contact.
- Create emergency communication plan and maintain up to date contact information for everyone in your communication chain.
- Establish leadership team, identify essential staff functions, assign tasks and responsibilities.



- Plan workshops and trainings to educate staff on prevention measures.
- Continue to monitor current information from health officials.

#### **What should a school do when a student or staff presents with symptoms of COVID-19?**

- COVID-19 presents with signs and symptoms that may be indistinguishable from much more common respiratory viruses. At this time, respiratory illnesses are much more likely to be due to common viruses (e.g., influenza, common cold) than COVID-19. If a community (or more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps. Schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19.
- Students with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing should be placed away from others and asked to wear a face mask until they can be sent home.
- Staff members should be sent home and advised to seek medical advice.
- Notify your local health department with any questions or concern about an ill student [www.localhealth.nj.gov](http://www.localhealth.nj.gov).

#### **Will schools be asked to close if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in the community?**

- Non pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) are strategies that can be used when other measures like treatment or vaccines are not available to combat an emerging illness with pandemic potential.
  - School closures and school dismissals are two recommended strategies to limit transmission within the community.
  - During school dismissals, childcare programs and schools may stay open for staff (if not ill) while students stay home. This allows teachers to develop and deliver lessons remotely and for other staff to continue to provide services.
- Schools may be asked to close preemptively or reactively, therefore schools should be making plans for what to do if there are recommendations for closing schools or cancelling events.
- Childcare and school administrators should work closely with local health officials when making decisions on dismissals or closures.

#### **What if a student/staff recently returned from travel to a country (other than China) where a travel alert has been issued?**

CDC has issued travel advisories for several countries. Details can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>. CDC is not recommending that these individuals be screened or monitored and should not be excluded from work. However, if a student or staff member have traveled to one of the countries listed on this website, they should:

- Notify the school so precautions can be taken if they become ill in school.
- Monitor their health for fever or cough, or have difficulty breathing.
- If they feel sick, they should stay home until they are fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication.
- If they have a fever and other respiratory symptoms, they should seek medical advice.



- Call ahead before you go to a doctor’s office or emergency room. Tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel while sick.
- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their sleeve (not their hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean their hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol immediately after coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.

**If there is a student or staff member who recently returned from China in the past 14 days, should they be excluded from work or school?**

- Travelers returning from mainland China will undergo a health screening and up to 14 days of self-quarantine with health monitoring to ensure they have not contracted the virus and do not pose a public health risk.
- All asymptomatic (without symptoms) students/staff under monitoring must be excluded from work and school for 14 days from their last date in China.
- Travelers will be asked to self-quarantine and self-monitor as directed by public health recommendations and to seek care if ill.
- Schools should be prepared to offer alternate instruction while student is quarantined. Please consult NJDOE regarding home instruction.

**When can a student or staff member return to school/work after being quarantined or self-isolated?**

Travelers who have been quarantined for 14 days and have remained asymptomatic may return to school unless they meet other criteria for school exclusion (see link to exclusion list below).

**Is a physician letter required for the student to return to school after their monitoring period is complete?**

Returning travelers under monitoring are not being monitored by their healthcare provider. If a letter is requested, the monitoring agreement the individual or guardian signs would serve as proof that the monitoring period is complete.

**Students are going for spring break; can they still go?**

Prior to traveling, individuals should consider the potential risks that may be involved in visiting their destination, including risk of transmission as well as the risk of quarantine upon returning. Destinations experiencing sustained community transmission should be avoided. Any person or group planning a trip outside of the United States should consult the CDC website for current travel advisories regarding any restrictions on travel. The situation is evolving. Stay up to date with CDC’s travel health notices related to this outbreak at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>. These notices will be updated as more information becomes available.



## **Do school events need to be canceled?**

At this time, there is no need to cancel school or social events. There are no cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, and there are no restrictions on public gatherings. Students should be reminded that part of good respiratory hygiene is staying home from events when they are ill. If COVID-19 is occurring in your community, public health may recommend modifying, postponing, or cancelling mass gatherings.

## **What preventive measures should a school take to help reduce the spread of respiratory illness including COVID-19 and the flu?**

NJDOH recommends that schools and childcare settings increase education on respiratory hygiene. Staff and children (as developmentally appropriate) should all be taught and asked to follow these steps that prevent the transmission of respiratory infections:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home if you're sick, especially with a fever.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

Additional preventive measures include:

- Continue to monitor students and staff who may exhibit respiratory symptoms.
- Adhere to exclusion recommendations from public health. For acute respiratory illness; fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication. Doctors notes for return do not supersede public health recommendations.
- Separate sick students and staff from others until they can be picked up to go home.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy, and the provision of supplies.
- Get a flu shot – it's not too late to be protected!

## **School Cleaning Procedures**

Special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illness. Schools should follow standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an EPA-registered product. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.



Outbreaks involving novel coronaviruses evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change frequently as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
  - [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [Guidance for Schools 2019-ncov](#)
  - [Get Your School Ready for Pandemic Flu](#)
- New Jersey Department of Health:
  - Novel Coronavirus [COVID-2019](#)
  - School Health <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/schoolhealth.shtml>
  - [School Exclusion List](#)
  - Local Health Department Directory [www.localhealth.nj.gov](http://www.localhealth.nj.gov)
- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center
  - [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools](#)