

COVID-19 Guidance: Colleges and Universities

Issued: 03/06/2020

Planning guidance for Colleges and Universities

As the global outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) evolves, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) are encouraged to prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks in the United States. Use this guidance to plan and make decisions now that will protect the health of your students, staff, and faculty. The guidance includes considerations to help administrators plan for the continuity of teaching, learning, and research if there is community spread of COVID-19 and address concerns related to COVID-19 associated stigma.

Review, update, and implement emergency plans in cooperation with local partners:

- Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). Effective strategies build on everyday policies and practices.
- Ensure the plan emphasizes common-sense preventive actions for students and staff. For example, emphasize actions such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often (include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available).
- Share your emergency plans with local partners (e.g., local public health and local emergency management) and ensure your plans outline how regular information sharing will occur.

Monitor and plan for absenteeism.

- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your institution and on your campus among students, staff, and faculty. Consider identifying and implementing processes for faculty and IHE leadership to report noticeable changes in absenteeism, even if subjective, to a designated administrator.
- Alert public health officials about large increases in student, staff, and faculty absenteeism or substantial increases in student health center traffic due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the “flu,” which have symptoms similar to symptoms of COVID-19).
- Students, staff, and faculty should not attend class or work when sick. Allow them to stay home to care for sick household members.
- Make accommodations (e.g., extended due dates, electronic submission of assignments), as possible, for individuals who may be temporarily unable to attend class due to restrictions placed on them related to possible exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff and faculty.
- Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching, learning, and research. Review the IDPH [guidance for businesses](#).

Establish procedures for students, staff, and faculty who are sick (with any illness) on campus.

- Establish procedures to ensure students, staff, and faculty who become sick (with any illness) on campus or arrive on campus sick are sent to their place of residence as soon as possible.
- Keep sick individuals separate from well individuals until they can leave.
- Sick residents of on-campus housing in communities with no identified COVID-19 and who are not believed to have been exposed to COVID-19 should avoid contact with well individuals while sick.

- Student health facilities should review COVID-19 infection control and screening recommendations available on the [IDPH](#) and [CDC](#) websites. If a community (or more specifically, an IHE) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.

Ensure IHE health clinics prepare for COVID-19

- Review CDC guidance to help healthcare facilities prepare for COVID-19. Guidance includes [steps to take now](#) and strategies for [preparing for community transmission](#) of COVID-19.

Perform routine environmental cleaning.

- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, countertops) with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down by students, staff, and faculty before each use.

Create plans to communicate accurate and timely information to the IHE community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and faculty without increasing fear and stigma. Keeping the community informed with accurate information can counter the spread of misinformation and reduce the potential for fear and stigma.
- Include strategies to communicate steps being taken by the IHE to prepare and how additional information will be shared.
- Include strategies to communicate changes to usual campus schedules or functions.
- Include strategies to communicate information IHE community members can use to protect themselves from infectious disease, including COVID-19.

Consider postponing or canceling student foreign exchange programs

Those overseeing student foreign exchange programs should be aware that students may face unpredictable circumstances, travel restrictions, challenges in returning home or accessing health care while abroad.

- Given the global outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) institutes of higher education (IHE) should consider postponing or canceling upcoming student foreign exchange programs.
- IHE should consider asking current program participants to return to their home country.
- IHEs should consider asking students participating in study abroad programs to return to the United States.
- IHEs should work with public health officials to determine the best approach for when and how (e.g., chartered transportation for countries or areas assessed as high-risk for exposure) their study abroad students might return. All plans for returning study abroad students should be designed to protect participants from stigma and discrimination.

The COVID-19 situation is dynamic. Given the speed of spread and the number of countries experiencing human-to-human transmission, IHEs should evaluate the risks associated with choosing to maintain programs abroad and take the appropriate proactive measures. IHEs that continue to maintain programs abroad should monitor [cdc.gov/COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID-19) for additional information.

For guidance for students, staff, or faculty who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC's [FAQ for travelers](#) and COVID-19 travel [website](#). For specific guidance on foreign exchange and study abroad programs, see CDC's guidance on student foreign travel for IHE.

Guidance for IHE with identified cases of COVID-19 in their community

If public health officials report that there are cases of COVID-19 in the community, IHEs may need to take additional steps to prevent spread of disease. IHEs should not make decisions about temporarily suspending classes or canceling events on their own. IHEs should seek specific guidance from the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and their local public health department to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps. Large event cancellations or class dismissals may be recommended for 14 days, or possibly longer if advised by public health officials. The nature of these actions (e.g., geographic scope, duration) may change as the local outbreak situation evolves.

During class dismissals, IHEs may stay open for staff and faculty (unless ill) while students temporarily stop attending in-person classes. Keeping the IHE facilities open a) allows faculty to develop and deliver lessons and materials electronically, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning; and b) allows other staff members to continue to provide services and help with additional response efforts.

IDPH and local public health officials may recommend temporary class dismissals if a student, staff, or faculty member attended classes or was active on campus prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case or if there is evidence of community spread of COVID-19.

- The public health recommendations for the scope (e.g., all campuses in a university system or only select campuses) and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the impacted community.
- IHEs should work with public health to ensure consistent messaging about the nature possible COVID-19 exposure and maintain confidentiality. In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student or staff member as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.
- If a student, staff, or faculty member notifies school officials that they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 infection, the IHE should seek guidance from public health to determine when students, staff, or faculty should return to campus and what additional steps are needed for the IHE community.
- In addition, students, staff, and faculty who are well but are taking care of or share a home with someone infected with COVID-19 should follow instructions from public health to determine when to return to campus.

If classes are dismissed, consider the following steps:

- **Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events.** Cancel or postpone events such as club meetings, performances, social events, athletic team practices, and sporting events.
- **Discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering or socializing anywhere.** Discourage gatherings at places like at a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or a local coffee shop.
- **Ensure continuity of education and research.**
 - Review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching and learning. Implement e-learning plans, including digital and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate.
 - Ensure continuity plans address how to temporarily postpone, limit, or adapt research-related activities (e.g., study recruitment or participation, access to labs) in a manner that protects the safety of researchers, participants, facilities, and equipment.
 - Consider the following approaches:
 - Use of existing infrastructure and services (e.g., Blackboard, Skype, Zoom) to support efficient transition of classes from in-person to distance-based formats. This may include

- using strategies such as faculty check-ins, recorded class meetings or lectures, and live class meetings.
- Other student support services such as online library services, print materials available online, phone- or internet-based counseling support, or study groups enabled through digital media.
 - IHE will need to determine, in consultation with their university system:
 - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train faculty to do so.
 - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff
 - How to deal with the potential lack of students' access to computers and the Internet at home or in temporary housing.
 - **Ensure continuity of safe housing.**
 - Work in close collaboration with public health officials to make all decisions related to on-campus housing.
 - If cases of COVID-19 have not been identified among residents of on-campus community housing, students may be allowed to remain in on-campus housing. In this situation, educate housing residents on the precautions they should take to help protect themselves when there is community spread of COVID-19. Residents should follow any more specific recommendations provided by local health officials.
 - If cases of COVID-19 have been identified among residents of on-campus community housing, work with local health officials to take additional precautions. Individuals with COVID-19 may need to be moved to temporary housing locations. These individuals will need to self-isolate and monitor for worsening symptoms according to the guidance of local health officials. Close contacts of the individuals with COVID-19 may also need temporary housing so that they can self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms. Consult with public health officials to determine when, how, and where to move ill residents. Information on providing home care to individuals with COVID-19 who do not require hospitalization is available on CDC's website.
 - Residents identified with COVID-19 or identified as contacts of individuals with COVID-19 should not necessarily be sent to their permanent homes off-campus. Sending sick residents to their permanent homes could be unfeasible, pose logistical challenges, or pose risk of transmission to others either on the way to the home or once there. IHEs should work with local health officials to determine appropriate housing for the period in which they need to self-isolate and monitor for symptoms or worsening symptoms.
 - Remember to consider all types of IHE-affiliated housing when making response plans. Distinct housing types (e.g., residence halls, apartments, fraternity and sorority houses) and situations (e.g., housing owned and run by the IHE, housing on the IHE campus but not run by the IHE) may require tailored approaches.
 - Ensure any staff remaining to support students in on-campus housing receive necessary training to protect themselves and residents from spread of COVID-19. Staff should also be trained on how to respond if a resident becomes ill.
 - **Ensure continuity of meal programs.**
 - Consult with local health officials to determine strategies for modifying food service offerings to the IHE community.
 - Consider ways to distribute food to students, particularly those who may remain on campus, while classes or other events and activities are dismissed.

- If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid food distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bagged lunches or meal delivery.
- Consider if and how existing dining services should be scaled back or adapted. For example, an IHE may close some of or all its cafeterias/cafes to discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering in group settings.
- If on-campus housing residents have been relocated to temporary alternative housing, consider how meals can be provided to these students. Work with local health officials to determine strategies for providing meals to residents with COVID-19 or who are being monitored because of contact with persons with COVID-19.
- Ensure any staff remaining on campus to support food services receive necessary training, to protect themselves and those they serve from spread of COVID-19.
- **Consider if and when to stop, scale back, or modify other support services on campus.**
 - Consider alternatives for providing students with essential medical and social services. Identify ways to ensure these services are provided while classes are dismissed or students are in temporary housing.
 - Identify other types of services provided to students, staff, and faculty (e.g., library services, cleaning services). Consider ways to adapt these to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission while maintaining services deemed necessary.
 - **Help counter stigma and promote resilience on campus.**
 - Share facts about COVID-19 through trusted dissemination channels to counter the spread of misinformation and mitigate fear.
 - Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people.
 - Develop plans to support students, staff, and faculty who may feel overwhelmed by COVID-19 and associated events on campus.
 - Ensure continuity of mental health services, such as offering remote counseling. Encourage students to call 911, [Your Life Iowa](#) at (855) 581-8111, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) if they are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like wanting to harm themselves or others

Planning and Communication Resources

Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing emergency plans.

- Multiple federal agencies have developed resources on school planning principles and a 6-step process for creating plans to build and continually foster safe and healthy school communities *before, during, and after* possible emergencies. Key resources include [guidance for developing high-quality emergency operations](#).
- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center’s [website](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA for schools, including IHE, and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

IHEs can also support their community by sharing resources with students, staff, and faculty.

- General fact sheets to help students, staff, and faculty understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves are available from:
 - IDPH: <https://idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus>
 - CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>