

COVID-19 Guidance: K-12 School Administrators

Issued: 03/01/2020

Planning guidance for K12 schools

As the global outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) evolves, schools 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 children in your care and your community.

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) and build on everyday school 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 school among both students and staff.
- Report greater than 10% absenteeism due to illness to public health through established channels or by entering the information into the online reporting system at: <https://redcap.idph.state.ia.us/surveys/?s=C4XNALH3R9>
- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
- Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
- Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.

Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school.

- Establish procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible. Keep sick students and staff separate from well students and staff until they can leave.
- Remember that schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19. The majority of respiratory illnesses are not 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.
- Share resources with the school community to help families understand when to keep children home. This guidance, not specific to COVID-19, from the American Academy of Pediatrics can be helpful for families <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/When-to-Keep-Your-Child-Home-from-Child-Care.aspx>.

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 and staff before each use.

Create communications plans for use with the school community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and their families.
- Include information about steps being taken by the school or childcare facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.

Assess whether school sponsored travel out of Iowa should be postponed or cancelled.

- CDC is currently recommending that schools postpone or cancel all international trips.
- Schools should consider postponing or canceling trips within the US that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Schools should consult with IDPH or their local health department to discuss the COVID-19 risk associated with specific out of state travel locations.
- Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from public health.

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

If public health officials report that there are cases of COVID-19 in the community, schools may need to take additional steps to prevent spread in the school and community, such as temporarily dismissing K-12 schools. Schools should not make decisions about dismissal or canceling events on their own. Schools 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 school 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 school dismissals, schools may stay open for staff members (unless ill) while students stay home. Keeping facilities open a) allows teachers to develop and deliver lessons and materials remotely, 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 school dismissals if a student or staff member is suspected or confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 or if there is evidence of community spread of COVID-19.

- The public health recommendations for the scope (e.g., a single school, a full district) and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis based on the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the impacted community.
- Schools 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 or staff member notifies school officials that they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 infection, school administrators should seek guidance from public health to determine when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community. In addition, students and staff 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 school.

If schools are dismissed, consider the following steps:

- **Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events.** Cancel or postpone events such as after-school assemblies and pep rallies, field trips, and sporting events.
- **Discourage students and staff from gathering or socializing anywhere.** Discourage gatherings at places like a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or the local shopping mall.
- **Ensure continuity of education.**
 - 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.
 - Determine, in consultation with school district officials the Iowa Department of Education or other local partners:
 - If a waiver is needed for state requirements of a minimum number of in-person instructional hours or school days (seat time) as a condition for funding;
 - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train teachers to do so;
 - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff;
 - How to encourage appropriate adult supervision while children are using distance learning approaches; and
 - How to deal with the potential lack of students' access to computers and the Internet at home.
- **Ensure continuity of meal programs.**
 - Consider ways to distribute food to students.
 - If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid 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 alternatives for providing essential medical and social services for students.**
 - Continue providing necessary services for children with special healthcare needs.

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 on developing high-quality school emergency operations plans](#), and a [companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality school emergency operations plans](#).
- The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA to schools and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

Childcare and K-12 administrators can also support their school community by sharing resources with students (if resources are age-appropriate), their families, and staff.

- General fact sheets to help staff and students' families 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>

The following resources should be used IF school closure is recommended by IDPH and Local Public Health.

DRAFT Press Release Template

Keeping Children Protected from COVID-19

The XXX School District, in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH), the Iowa Department of Education, and XXX County public health, has announced all schools (or which schools) in the district will be closed until at least XXX, XX, 2020. The closure is a precautionary action resulting from the COVID-19 virus being identified within our community.

The primary goal of this and any future school closure is to limit the spread of COVID-19. COVID-19 is spread through contact between people. Therefore, while a school closure limits one type of student contact, it's important to limit other types of contact as well. During this period of school closure, we strongly recommend that students stay at home and not be in close contact with other children. Students should not spend time in friends' homes and public areas where children gather such as sporting events, community recreation centers, shopping malls, and theaters.

More information about COVID-19 may be found at [idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus](https://www.idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus).

The following resources should be used IF school closure is recommended by IDPH and Local Public Health.

(PLACE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT LETTERHEAD)

Date:

Parents,

This letter is to inform you that the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and [Name of Local Public Health Department] officials have recommended that [School District Name] close the following schools [Name of School] due to the potential for spread of the COVID-19 virus. The school(s) will be closed beginning immediately and will remain closed until we receive further information from public health. At this time, all school-related functions, including sporting events, will also be cancelled.

During this period of school closure, we strongly recommend that students stay at home and not be in close contact with other children. Students should not spend time in friends' homes and public areas where children gather such as sporting events, community recreation centers, shopping malls, and theaters.

In order to protect the confidentiality of any ill student(s), we will not be releasing the names or any other health information. We request that you respect the privacy of student(s) and their family.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. If you or your child have any of these symptoms, you should stay home from work, school and child care. Those that have severe symptoms should consider seeking healthcare, but call your healthcare provider first to ensure you can be seen in a manner that does not put other people at risk. Health care providers will work with public health to determine if testing for COVID-19 is necessary.

It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting sick and protect others from infection. The following steps can be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Teach your children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Teach your children to cover coughs with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. Cough into your sleeve—not your hands.

We will continue to work with local and state public health officials to monitor this situation and will inform parents if the situation changes and if further actions are necessary.

For more information, visit idph.iowa.gov and www.cdc.gov.

[LOCAL WEBSITE], or [LOCAL TELEPHONE CONTACT INFORMATION].

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.