

2019 Novel Coronavirus FAQ for Schools

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Q: What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus?

A: 2019 novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: Many of the initial patients in the outbreak had a link to a large seafood and live animal market in Wuhan, China, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, the virus is now being spread person-to-person, primarily in China. Most often, spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about 6 feet), mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes.

Q: Is COVID-19 the same as other coronaviruses?

A: It is important to understand that there are seven different coronaviruses known to infect humans. Four of the seven coronaviruses are very common, cause milder symptoms (similar to the common cold) and most people will be infected with at least one of these in their lifetime. The other three of the seven coronaviruses are rare and can cause more severe illness; these include the COVID-19.

Q: Is there a risk for COVID-19 from products or packages shipped from China?

A: People receiving imported goods from China are not at risk of contracting COVID-19. Coronaviruses do not survive long on objects such as letters or packages.

Q: What if a student recently returned from travel to China?

A: Individuals returning to the U.S. from the People's Republic of China may require symptom monitoring and home isolation, as directed by state and local public health officials. Note: this does not include travel from the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, or the island of Taiwan. Individuals with recent travel to any other country do not require any specific monitoring, testing or isolation. As always, it is recommended individuals ill with any infectious disease stay home while ill to prevent spread to others.

Q: What if a student has a household or close contact with recent travel to China, even though the student did not travel?

A: Contacts of recent travelers to China who did not travel should be free to attend school, as normal. In the event a case of COVID-19 is identified in Iowa, contacts of the case will be evaluated for risk by public health and potentially monitored, isolated or tested, per CDC guidance.

Q: What is the risk of the COVID-19 to Iowans? Are certain groups of people more likely to be infected with COVID-19 than others?

A: Currently, the risk for COVID-19 is associated with recent travel to China, not race or country of origin. Overall, the COVID-19 risk to Iowans remains low at this time.

Q: Who should I call if I have questions?

A: Please contact IDPH's Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE) at (800) 362-2736.

Q: What can schools do to reduce the risk of spread of seasonal respiratory illnesses?

A: CDC recommends the following recommendations for reducing the spread of respiratory illness in schools:

Encourage students, parents and staff to take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.

- Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick.
 - Teach students, parents and staff the importance of staying home when sick until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (chills, feeling very warm, flushed appearance or sweating) without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
 - Review school policies and consider revising those that make it difficult for students and staff to stay home when sick or when caring for others who are sick.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette among students and staff through education.
 - Teach students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their bent arm.
 - Provide adequate supplies within easy reach, including tissues and no-touch trash cans.
- Encourage hand hygiene among students and staff through education, scheduled time for handwashing and the provision of supplies.
 - Teach students and staff to wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, dry hands with a paper towel and use the paper towel to turn off the faucet. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used.
- Encourage students and staff to keep their hands away from their nose, mouth and eyes.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning.
 - Routinely clean surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles and phones.
 - Provide adequate supplies, such as general EPA-registered cleaning products, gloves, disinfecting wipes and no-touch trashcans.

Educate students, parents and staff on what to do if someone gets sick.

- Teach students, parents and staff the signs and symptoms of respiratory illness, emergency warning signs and high risk groups.
- Separate sick students and staff from others until they can be picked up to go home. When feasible, identify a "sick room" through which others do not regularly pass. The sick room should be separated from areas used by well students for routine health activities, such as picking up medications. Sick room staff should be limited in number and should not be at high risk for severe illness if they get sick.

Establish relationships with state and local public health officials for ongoing communication.

- Follow your local flu situation through close communication with state and local health officials.
- Update emergency plans so that they are in place before an outbreak occurs.