

## **Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Schools**

### **CURRENT SITUATION:**

The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) that has heavily impacted China and expanded globally has created health concerns around the globe, including here in Indiana. Schools, working with local health departments, play an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure students have safe and healthy learning environments. Schools serve students, staff and visitors from throughout the community. All of these people may have close contact in the school building, often sharing spaces, equipment and supplies.

As with other respiratory illnesses, including influenza, COVID-19 typically spreads from person to person among close contacts — which generally includes a range of about six feet in proximity — through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. There is currently no vaccine or antiviral treatment for novel coronavirus.

At this time, the risk of individuals who have not traveled or had contact with someone ill with COVID-19 becoming ill from this virus is low, including students and staff in Indiana schools. To mitigate possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for schools to do now is plan and prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks. Schools want to be ready if COVID-19 appears in their communities. To help with that preparation and communication, a parent letter template and guidance for school nurses who may screen students for COVID-19 is attached to this guidance.

### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COVID-19:**

- ISDH recommends that people stay home when sick, cover their coughs, practice good hand hygiene, and disinfect high-touch surfaces. These recommendations are especially important during cold and flu season, and Indiana is still experiencing high influenza activity.
- COVID-19 symptoms are similar to these more common infections and include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. At this time, it is far more likely that anyone in Indiana with respiratory symptoms is suffering from a cold or flu.
- ISDH does not recommend travel to any country under a Level 3 travel advisory. Anyone considering travel to a country under a Level 2 travel advisory should consider their current health condition as individuals older than 65, those with underlying health issues and anyone with suppressed immune systems are considered at higher risk. With spring break approaching, you may want to ensure that students who travel abroad understand they could be subject to quarantine and other delays upon return as the circumstances change.
- Students and staff who have not traveled to countries with a Level 2 or 3 travel advisory or been in contact with someone confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 in the last 14 days are at low risk of becoming sick with the virus. You can find out more information about travel advisories at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

- Because there is no vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 at this time, the [CDC's Nonpharmaceutical Interventions](#) (NPIs) have recommendations to help you plan for community transmission. Although this guidance is geared toward pandemic flu outbreaks, these guidelines are useful for planning for future respiratory disease outbreaks from other pathogens as well, including COVID-19.
- This situation is changing rapidly, and there are many unanswered questions, which can cause fear and anxiety that can lead to social stigma toward Chinese or other Asian Americans. Help discourage stigma by providing social support and communicating the facts that being Chinese or Asian American does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19.
- CDC has released revised [guidance for schools](#): and for [school closures](#).

#### SCHOOL GUIDANCE FOR PLANNING AND PREPARING:

- Review, update and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).
- Develop information-sharing systems with partners.
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism. Monitor the number, percentage and reason for absenteeism in each building of the school corporation and for the total school corporation.
- Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning. Clean and disinfect frequently-touched objects and surfaces using a regular cleaning spray or wipe.
- Create communications plans for use with the school community.
- Review CDC's guidance for business and employers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>.
- Create plans for ensuring continuity of education and meal programs for students.
- Discuss how to handle students enrolling or traveling to areas with community spread of COVID-19 with your local health officials.

#### SCHOOL GUIDANCE WHEN A CONFIRMED CASE OCCURS IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

- Keep in close contact with your local health officials to assess the level of COVID-19 in your community.
- Work with your local health officials to determine if, when and for how long childcare programs or schools may need to be dismissed or school events need to be canceled.
- During school dismissals, childcare programs and schools may stay open for staff members (unless ill) while students stay home.

#### SCHOOL GUIDANCE WHEN A CONFIRMED CASE OCCURS IN YOUR SCHOOL:

- Local health officials may recommend temporary school dismissals if a student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case.
- Schools should work with the local health department and other relevant leadership to communicate the possible COVID-19 exposure.
- If a student or staff member has been identified with COVID-19, school and program administrators should seek guidance from local health officials to determine when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community.

## SCHOOL GUIDANCE WHEN SCHOOLS ARE DISMISSED

- Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events.
- Discourage students and staff from gathering or socializing anywhere.
- Ensure continuity of education.
- Ensure continuing of meal programs.

On March 12, 2020, Governor Eric J. Holcomb announced the following actions:

- Effective immediately, school corporations will be provided with a 20-day waiver of the required 180 instructional days for use as needed for the remainder of the academic year. The waived days do not need to be used consecutively and can be leveraged as needed.
  - If a school corporation has evidence of community spread or a confirmed positive test for novel coronavirus, officials should consult with the Indiana Department of Education and the Indiana State Department of Health for additional steps. Schools should plan now for broader closures, including eLearning and remote classroom options.
  - The Department of Education will release additional guidance detailing the process for submitting waiver requests as early as Friday.
  - Schools should follow the guidelines for non-essential gatherings as they make decisions about non-essential extra-curricular or co-curricular activities.
    - Gathering guidance states that non-essential gatherings must be limited to no more than 250 people. This includes any event or gathering of people who are in one room or a single space at the same time, such as cafeterias, churches, stadiums, meeting and conference rooms, auditoriums and the like. This guidance applies to professional, social, community and similar other gatherings.

We know there may be specific situations that arise where you have questions. We encourage schools to call the ISDH Epidemiology Resource Center toll-free, at 877-826-0011 (available 8 a.m. to midnight) or email [epiresource@isdh.in.gov](mailto:epiresource@isdh.in.gov). Your state and local partners are ready to assist you with any questions you have.

**For more information:** More information about COVID-19 is available on the ISDH website at [www.in.gov/isdh](http://www.in.gov/isdh); check back periodically for updates. ISDH will provide additional guidance as the situation evolves.

*Please share this information with your school health personnel and administrators, and ask them to share with staff, parents and students as needed.*