

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information for Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools March 2020

This document is intended primarily for administrators of public and private childcare programs and K-12 schools to provide information on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and to help prevent the introduction of COVID-19 into childcare and K-12 schools. It recommends actions that administrators should take now to prepare for community transmission in West Virginia, and steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students and staff if there is a future outbreak of COVID-19 that may impact West Virginia communities.

Schools and childcare programs, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure students have a safe and healthy learning environment. Schools serve students, staff, and visitors from throughout the community. All these people may have close contact in the school setting, often sharing spaces, equipment, and supplies.

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person-to-person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. The first case of COVID-19 in the U.S. was reported on January 21, 2020; COVID-19 is now spreading from person-to-person in parts of the U.S. Risk of infection with COVID-19 is higher for people who are close contacts of someone known to have COVID-19, for example, healthcare workers or household members. Other people at higher risk for infection are those who live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

How Does COVID-19 Spread?

Based on what is currently known about this virus, it is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. Person-to-person spread occurs 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. Most often, person-to-person spread is thought to happen among people in close contact (about 6 feet) with each other. As with most respiratory viruses, people are likely to be the most contagious when they are most symptomatic. It may be possible that 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, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

What Are the Symptoms?

There is no evidence that children are more susceptible to this virus. Reported illnesses among persons with COVID-19 have ranged from mild symptoms to severe respiratory illness and death. The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure: fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Limited reports of children with COVID-19 in China have described cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. These limited reports suggest that children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally presented with mild symptoms, and though severe complications (acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock) have been reported, they appear to be uncommon. However, as with other respiratory illnesses, certain populations of children may be at an increased risk of severe infection, such as children with underlying health conditions.

Can a Child or Staff Member Come to School or Attend Childcare if They Traveled to China or Other Geographical Locations Where Community Spread is Occuring?

Individuals who arrived from China or other geographical locations where community spread is occurring should stay home from school/childcare for 14 days since they left. These children should be monitored by public health officials and be able to return to school with no restrictions after the monitoring period is over. Schools can support students and staff who may be asked by public health officials to stay home by allowing leniency in absenteeism from school and extracurricular activities.

What if a Child or Staff Member Has Traveled to China or Other Geographical Locations Where Community Spread is Occuring and Becomes Sick?

Individuals who have traveled from China or other geographical locations where there is community spread in the past 14 days should not be at school or work until they are cleared by public health officials. At this time, there is no known risk of transmission of the virus beyond the 14 days from last exposure. If an individual develops symptoms within 14 days of their travel, they should notify public health officials and seek medical advice. Call ahead before going to a doctor's office or emergency room. Tell them about recent travel history and symptoms.

What if a Child is Sick with Fever and Respiratory Symptoms?

Any child with fever, even without travel history, should stay home from school/childcare until fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS/CHILDCARE FACILITIES WHICH DO NOT HAVE COVID-19 IDENTIFIED IN THEIR COMMUNITY

What Can Schools/Childcare Facilities do to Prepare for a Possible COVID-19 Outbreak in Their Community?

There are laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. As this global outbreak evolves, schools/childcare facilities are encouraged to prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks in West Virginia. Schools and childcare facilities want to be ready if COVID-19 does appear in their communities. Administrators of childcare programs and K-12 schools should take the following actions to plan and prepare for COVID-19:

1. Stay informed about COVID-19 through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and your state and local health department. For the most up-to-date information on this outbreak, please visit www.coronavirus.wv.gov or www.cdc.gov/COVID19.
2. Help staff and students' families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves by sharing these fact sheets:
 - [What you need to know about COVID-19](#)
 - [What to do if you're sick with COVID-19](#)
 - [Stop the spread of germs](#)
3. Review and ensure your emergency operations plan is up-to-date, particularly for infectious disease outbreaks.
 - 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.
 - The U.S. Department of Education has outlined a 6-step process for creating emergency operation plans for K-12 schools: <https://rems.ed.gov/K12GuideForDevelHQSchool.aspx>.
4. Review and adjust attendance and sick leave policies to encourage students and staff to stay home when sick or caring for sick family members.
5. Schools are encouraged to track absenteeism as a proxy for disease transmission. This will help schools understand the usual absenteeism patterns. Alert your local health department about large increases in student or staff absenteeism due to respiratory illnesses.
 - Suspected or confirmed outbreaks are immediately reportable to the local health department.
 - Establish procedures for separating sick students and staff from those who are well and for sending sick students and staff home as soon as possible.
 - Take into consideration older adults and individuals who have serious chronic medical conditions that may be at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19.

6. Encourage staff and students to practice good hygiene.
 - Stop handshaking - use other noncontact methods of greeting.
 - Clean hands at the door and at regular intervals.
 - Create habits and reminders to avoid touching faces and covering coughs and sneezes.
7. Develop information sharing systems with partners. Local health departments should be a key partner in information sharing.
8. Continue to perform routine environmental cleaning. Most EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
 - 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.
 - For a list of approved products visit: <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>.
9. Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread should contact their local health department before returning to school and may be asked to stay home and monitor themselves for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS/CHILDCARE FACILITIES WITH IDENTIFIED CASES OF COVID-19 IN THEIR COMMUNITY

Should a School/Childcare Facility Cancel Field Trips or Other Events (e.g., Sporting Events, Afterschool Activities, etc.)?

Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. For out of state travel, schools should consider the local environment to where they are traveling, the types of activities planned, and health status of those traveling to make an informed decision on whether to travel.

Regarding international travel, all should very carefully follow CDC travel advisories, understand the current situation en route and at the destination and consider the need for non-essential, school-sponsored travel. Although typically longer programs, CDC travel guidance for universities includes the recommendation to consider postponing or canceling upcoming student international study or travel programs, noting that “those overseeing student international travel programs should be aware that students may face unpredictable circumstances, travel restrictions, and challenges in returning home or accessing health care while abroad.”

Are There Additional Actions to Prevent Disease Transmission in a School/Childcare Facility?

Consider ways in which children gather in groups and consider adjusting school interactions to avoid mixing between classes and grades. Implement social distancing interventions in schools where feasible; examples include serving lunch in classrooms, staggered recess, and reducing the number of times students change classrooms throughout the day. When possible, hold classes outdoor or in open, well-ventilated spaces. In childcare settings, limit rotating staff into different childcare rooms, limit interactions between different childcare rooms, and consider postponing moving children into different childcare rooms.

Should a School/Childcare Facility Dismiss for COVID-19?

Temporarily dismissing schools and childcare facilities is a strategy to stop or slow the further spread of COVID-19 in communities. During school dismissals, childcare programs and schools may stay open for staff members (unless ill) while students stay home. Keeping facilities open:

- Allows teachers to develop and deliver lessons and materials remotely, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning; and
- Allows other staff members to continue to provide services and help with additional response efforts.

What Happens if an Ill Student or Staff Member Attended School Prior to Being Confirmed as a COVID-19 Case?

- Contact your local health department immediately.
- Local health departments may recommend temporary school dismissals if a student or staff member attended school/childcare facility prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case. This should be considered on a school-by-school basis, and in consultation and coordination with the West Virginia Department of Education and state and local health departments.
- To help reduce the possibility of further transmission of COVID-19 within a school/childcare and within the larger community, consider temporary dismissals of 14 days if a student or staff member attended school/childcare prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case.
- 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 school 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 with a case of COVID-19 should follow instructions from local health officials to determine when they can return to school.
- Schools may need to consider dismissal for administrative purposes if they are unable to maintain safe student-to-teacher ratios. This should be considered on a school-by-school basis, and in consultation and coordination with the West Virginia Department of Education and state and local health departments.

What Should Schools Do if School is Dismissed?

1. Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events, such as afterschool assemblies and pep rallies, field trips, and sporting events.
2. Discourage students and staff from gathering or socializing anywhere, like at a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or the local shopping mall.
3. If available, implement e-learning plans and distance learning options for continuity of education.
4. Work with local health officials to ensure continuity of school children-directed supplemental feeding programs. 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.
5. Consider alternatives for providing essential medical and social services for students.

What Additional Resources Are Available for School/Childcare Facilities?

We know there may be specific situations that arise where you have questions. We encourage schools/childcare facilities to call their local health department to discuss the situation before making recommendations. We will work together to determine the best course of action. If your local health department is not available, call the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health, Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE) at (304) 558-5358, extension 1 or the 24/7 answering service at (304) 347-0843.

For additional information on COVID-19 for schools and childcare facilities please visit our webpage at: www.coronavirus.wv.gov.

Questions and concerns can also be directed to the 24/7, toll-free COVID-19 information hotline, 1-800-887-4304.