

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Schools Information for School Nurses and Administrators

Background

Many parts across the world are experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus. This virus can spread from person-to-person and the number of cases detected in the United States and many other countries is growing.

Currently, the immediate risk to the general public in Washington and the United States is considered to be low. There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spreading in Washington at this time.

As new information emerges, please remind your community that *the risk of COVID-19 is not at all connected with race, ethnicity or nationality*. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Sharing accurate information during a time of heightened concern is one of the best things we can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Some coronaviruses have caused more severe illness, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus that was not identified in humans before December 2019.

What are common symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. It takes 2 to 14 days after a person gets the virus in their body to become ill. COVID-19 is a new disease, and we are learning more each day about its symptoms and how it is spread.

How does the virus spread?

Most often, it is spread from person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu 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 their eyes. Often, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

Who should seek medical evaluation for COVID-19?

Students, staff, and volunteers who are:

- Ill with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from China in the last 14 days
- Ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have been identified by public health officials as a recent close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case or had recent close contact with someone who is being evaluated for COVID-19 infection.

What should I do if I suspect a student, staff member, or volunteer is at risk for COVID-19?

If a student, staff member, or volunteer meets the above criteria, it is important to place them in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask. Immediately notify your [local health department](#). They will provide you with guidance.

If you need this document in an alternative format, call 800.525.0127 (for TDD/TTY call 711).

Should children returning from China stay home from school for 14 days?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all travelers from China (including school students, staff and volunteers) arriving in the United States AFTER February 2, 2020 at 2 p.m. stay at home, away from others, and monitor their health for 14 days. This measure was put in place because of the increasing number of cases of COVID-19 in China. If these individuals develop a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing during this 14-day period, they should call their local health department and healthcare provider to tell them about their symptoms and recent travel.

What can I do to prevent COVID-19 in my school?

Schools do not need to take any special precautions beyond what is normally recommended to prevent the spread of viruses in schools. You can help students and staff reduce their risk for getting and spreading viral respiratory infections, including the flu and the common cold, by encouraging them to take simple steps which will also prevent COVID-19.

These include:

- **Staying home when they are sick.**
- **Frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds**, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after they blow their nose. Help young children do the same. If hands are visibly dirty, use soap and water to clean hands.
- If soap and water are not readily available, **using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.**
- Advising persons to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Following the school's routine cleaning and disinfection program. Emphasizing to **clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.**
- **Covering coughs or sneezes with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash and cleaning hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer (if soap and water are not readily available).**
- **Urging students and staff to get a flu shot during the flu season.**
- **Providing adequate supplies for good hygiene**, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

As with any newly emerging infectious disease, knowledge evolves with time.

Early on, it is difficult to know the ways in which the disease spreads, how effectively it spreads from person to person, and how severe the infection is. We will continue to update the [DOH novel coronavirus website](#) as more information becomes available.

Cleaning and disinfecting procedures

Special processes beyond routine cleaning are not necessary nor recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illness. Schools should follow standard procedures for cleaning with third party certified "green" cleaners and disinfecting with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectant with a claim for human coronaviruses. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as bathrooms, water coolers, desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.

Disinfecting is the responsibility of school custodial staff. They are trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills – blood, vomit, feces, and urine. Contact your custodian or school nurse if students are ill and your classroom needs cleaning and disinfection.

Clean the surface first to remove all organic matter. Custodial staff should follow the disinfectant manufacturer's instructions for use including:

- Using the proper concentration of disinfectant
- Allowing the required wet contact time

If you need this document in an alternative format, call 800.525.0127 (for TDD/TTY call 711).

- Paying close attention to hazard warnings and instructions for using personal protective items such as gloves and eye protection
- Using disinfectants in a sufficiently ventilated space

Schools and districts must have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each chemical used in the school.

Where can I turn for more information?

- [Novel Coronavirus Outbreak 2020](#), Washington State Department of Health
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus, Wuhan, China](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Guidance for Travelers](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Schools \(K-12\) and Child Care Programs Guidance](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Classroom Cleaning - Tips for Teachers](#), Washington State Department of Health
- [Handwashing to Prevent Illness at School](#), Washington State Department of Health
- [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff, OSPI, 2014 \(PDF\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Schools Presentation - February 25, 2020 \(PDF\)](#)
- Washington State Department of Health novel coronavirus call center: 1-800-525-0127 and press #