

# Get Your School Ready for COVID-19

A COVID-19 outbreak could last for a long time in your community. Public health officials may recommend community actions to keep students and staff healthy, reduce exposures to COVID-19, and slow the spread of the disease. Below you will find recommendations for what you as a school administrator may do to get ready for COVID-19.

## Planning and Preparedness

Administrators of K-12 schools may take the following actions to plan for a COVID-19 outbreak.

- ◆ Review, update, and implement school emergency operation plans, especially plans for infectious disease outbreaks.
- ◆ Emphasize actions students and staff can take to prevent the spread of COVID-19: staying home when sick, appropriately covering coughs and sneezes, and frequently washing hands.
- ◆ Assure that frequently touched surfaces are cleaned daily (door knobs, phones, keyboards, cell phones, faucet handles, light switches, etc.)
- ◆ Monitor and plan for absenteeism:
  - ◆ Review usual absenteeism patterns.
  - ◆ Review attendance and sick leave policies. Be flexible when possible if staff need to stay home with ill family members.
  - ◆ Alert health officials if absenteeism due to respiratory illness increases.
- ◆ Monitor and plan for addressing fear/bullying related to COVID-19.

## What can staff and students do to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

- ◆ Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- ◆ Stay home when they are sick, except to get medical care.
- ◆ Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into the inside of their elbow. Throw away tissue in trash after use.
- ◆ Frequently wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizer, especially after coughing, blowing their nose, or sneezing into a tissue.

## What environmental cleaning procedures should my school take to keep staff and students healthy?

- ◆ Routinely clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces like door knobs, phones, keyboards, cell phones, faucet handles, light switches, etc. with cleaners you typically use.
- ◆ Provide disposable disinfecting wipes so students and staff may wipe them down before use.
- ◆ Provide hand sanitizer and tissues in class rooms.
- ◆ Assure restrooms have soap and paper towels.

## What should I do if my school experiences increased absenteeism?

- ◆ Report this to your local health department.

## Should my school screen students for COVID-19?

- ◆ 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 school has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.

## What should I do if a student or staff recently travelled to an area where there is community spread of COVID-19?

Contact your local health department. Individuals returning from areas where there is sustained community spread of COVID-19 should follow advice from health officials. In most cases, this will include a 14-day home quarantine even if the person is asymptomatic.

### **What steps should my school take if a student or staff member develops symptoms of COVID-19?**

- ◆ Establish procedures to ensure students and staff who come to school sick or become sick during the day are sent home as soon as possible. If procedure masks are available, have the sick student/staff put on a mask.
- ◆ Keep sick students and staff separate from those who are well. Identify a location where ill students will go until they are picked up by a parent or guardian.
- ◆ Wipe down horizontal surfaces, door knobs, faucet handles, toilet handles, and other surfaces in the room where students go while awaiting pick-up.

### **Should the school be closed if there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 among students and staff?**

You may need to use temporary school dismissals of 14 days, or possibly longer, if a student or staff member attended school before being confirmed as having COVID-19. Any decision about school dismissal or cancellation of school events should be made in coordination with your local health officials. Schools are not expected to make decisions about dismissal and event cancellation independent of their local health officials. Dismissal and event cancellation decisions should be considered on a case-by-case basis using information from health officials about the local conditions. Discussions between the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Nebraska Department of Education are ongoing.

### **If I make the decision to dismiss school, what else should I consider?**

In the event of a school dismissal, extracurricular group activities and large events, such as performances, field trips, and sporting events should also be cancelled. This may require close coordination with other partners and organizations (e.g., high school athletics associations, music associations). In addition, discourage students and staff from gathering or socializing anywhere, like at a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or the local shopping mall. Consider ways to continue meal programs and consider alternatives to providing essential medical and social services for students.

### **Are there ways for students to keep learning if school is dismissed?**

Yes, many schools may use e-learning plans and distance learning options for continuity of education, if available. Your school or district's emergency operations plan should have recommended strategies for ensuring continuity of education and may provide guidance on how to proceed during a school dismissal. In addition, you may be able to use and/or scale up approaches used in other situations when students have not been able to attend school (e.g. inclement weather, facility damage, power outages).

### **If school is dismissed, what should be considered when re-opening the building?**

CDC is currently working on additional guidance to help schools determine when and how to re-open their buildings to students. If you need immediate assistance with this, consult local health officials for guidance.

### **What resources does CDC have for staff, students, and parents?**

- ◆ [CDC's health communication resources](#)
- ◆ [CDC information on stigma and COVID-19](#)
- ◆ [CDC information on COVID-19 and children](#)
- ◆ CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](#), information on [proper handwashing technique](#), and tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits.
- ◆ Other health and education professional organizations may also have helpful resources your school can use or share, such as the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- ◆ [CDC's information on helping children cope with emergencies](#)



**For more information related to COVID-19, please contact:**

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