

## Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Schools and Child Care Facilities

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has developed this guidance to assist schools and child care facilities with their response to 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. While the situation is evolving, at this time we believe that those over 60, immune-compromised or those with chronic medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Schools and child care facilities have experience managing respiratory infections and outbreaks among residents and staff and should apply the same outbreak management principles to COVID-19. Additional resources on how schools and child care facilities can prepare for and manage COVID-19 can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>

### Prepare:

- **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.** Know where to turn for reliable, up-to-date information in your local community. Monitor the [CDC COVID-19 website](#) and your [state and local health department websites](#) for the latest information.
- **Develop, or review, your facility's emergency operations plan.** Ensure your facility has a plan that includes strategies to reduce the spread of disease and establishes mechanisms for ongoing communication with staff, students, volunteers, families, and the community. This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners.
- **Monitor and plan for absenteeism.** A COVID-19 outbreak in your community could lead to staff and student absenteeism. Prepare alternative staffing plans to ensure as many of your facility's staff are available as possible. See the Department of Health's [Resources for Workplaces and Employers](#) for more specific information.
- **Establish relationships with key healthcare and public health partners in your community.** Make sure you know about healthcare and public health emergency planning and response activities in your community, and establish open lines of communication with leadership in your [local health jurisdiction](#).
- **Build relations with key community organizations, partners, and trusted leaders within your community.** In the event of a closure, you may need to rely on community partnerships to help mitigate impacts to families.
- **Create an emergency contact list.** Develop and continuously update emergency contact lists for key partners and ensure the lists are accessible in key locations in your facility. For example, know how to reach your local or state health department in an emergency.
- **Develop a communications plan.** A key component to preparedness is developing a communications plan that outlines how you plan to reach different audiences including ensuring all communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate as well as accessible for individuals with disabilities.

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## Communicate:

- **Communicate about COVID-19 with your staff.** Share information about what is currently known about COVID-19 and your facility's preparedness plans. Communicate your expectations for modeling respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick, and supporting employees who need to take care of a sick
- **Communicate about COVID-19 with students and families.** Provide updates about changes to your policies or operations. Use all communication channels that you have available and including direct communications (face-to-face, letters), electronic communications (your district or facility's website or social media pages), as well as parent meetings to share updates. Make sure to plan ahead for linguistic needs, including providing interpreters and translating materials.
- **Intentionally and persistently combat stigma.** Misinformation about coronavirus and COVID-19 can create fear and hostility that hurts people and makes it harder to keep everyone healthy. We're stronger as a community when we stand together against discrimination. Take advantage of these [resources](#) to prevent, interrupt, and respond to stigma.

## Prevent:

- **Encourage sick individuals to stay home.** Instruct all staff, students, families, and volunteers to self-screen at home. If students or staff become sick at school, keep sick individuals separate from well students and staff until they can leave. Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that staff are aware of these policies.
  - If individuals have fever, cough or shortness of breath and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID19, they should stay home away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms get better.
  - If an individual believes they have had close contact to someone with COVID-19 but are not currently sick, they should monitor their health for fever, cough, and shortness of breath during the 14 days after the last day they were in close contact with the sick person with COVID-19. They should not go to work or school, and should avoid public places for 14 days.
- **Post signs.** As part of routine measures for the respiratory season, existing [signs](#) should be visible that reminds staff, visitors, and students to perform hand hygiene, sneeze/cough into their elbow, put used tissues in a waste receptacle and to wash hands immediately after using tissues. Recommend everyone to avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning.** Follow the school's routine cleaning and disinfection program. Emphasize cleaning and [disinfecting](#) frequently touched objects and surfaces. The Department of Health Website has additional information on [Classroom Cleaning Tips for Teachers](#).

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- **Emphasize normally recommended actions to prevent the spread of disease.** You can help students and staff reduce their risk for getting and spreading viral respiratory infections by encouraging them to take simple steps which will also prevent COVID-19. These include:
  - 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.
  - 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).
  - Providing adequate supplies for good hygiene, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### Mitigate:

- **If there is an identified case of COVID-19 in your community, work in close collaboration and coordination with your leadership, local health officials, and other health care and public health partners in your community to make decisions regarding measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.**
- **Implement social distancing measures.** If there are cases of COVID-19 in the community, consider using social distancing rather than closing facilities until there is evidence that a case is linked to the school or child care facility in some way. Examples of social distancing include staggering recess times or canceling assemblies, inter-school competitions, and sporting events.
- **Communicate about potential exposure to COVID-19.** It is critical to maintain confidentiality of the individual while working to address potential fear and anxiety of students and staff.
- **Determine if, when, and for how long it may be appropriate to dismiss school and child care programs.** In general, schools and child care facilities should only close if a student, staff member, or administrator has been diagnosed with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
  - Consider closing schools and child care facilities for 2 to 5 days and cooperate with local health officials in their investigation during this time. Seek guidance from local health officials about the need to lengthen facility closures or resuming normal operations.
  - It is not recommended to preemptively close schools or child care facilities for cleaning if there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 associated with the facility.

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- **Assess the impacts of any decisions you make on the families you serve.** There are equity implications for any decision you may make, and the families you work with will be able to provide you the best feedback on and guidance on how to move forward in a child- and family-centered way. Here are some considerations:
  - A. When communicating updates and decisions: Families within Washington state are culturally and linguistically diverse. Make sure you are proactively providing language assistance.
  - B. When considering alternative learning opportunities, including distance learning: Providing options for distance or remote learning may be a useful mitigation strategy, but efforts should be made to ensure that all students will have access to the materials, equipment and technology necessary to participate. Another important equity consideration is the impact requiring remote learning will have on families that don't have available caregivers or other adults to supervise children at home. A plan for remote learning may disproportionately impact and have unintended negative consequences for single parent households, low wage and hourly workers, and other lower income families.

## Additional COVID-19 Resources

- [DOH Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) – updated information and resources daily
- [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 \(PDF\)](#), Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- [Workplace and Employers](#), Washington State Department of Health
- [Stigma Reduction](#), Washington State Department of Health
- [How Can I Be Prepared for a COVID-19 Outbreak?](#)

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