

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education

The Washington State Department of Health has developed this guidance to assist institutions of higher education with their response to the 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. Institutions of higher education have experience managing respiratory infections and outbreaks among students and staff and should apply the same outbreak management principles to COVID-19. Additional resources on how institutions of higher education can prepare for and manage COVID-19 can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.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 campus' emergency operations plan.** Ensure your institution has a plan that includes strategies to reduce the spread of disease and establishes mechanisms for ongoing communication with staff, students, volunteers, and the community. This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners.
 - Consider including additional guidance related to congregate settings for students who depend on student housing and food services. Develop contingency plan for students who utilize dining hall services, including the potential for distribution of pre-packed goods.
- **Develop, or review, your institution's plan for individuals studying or working abroad.** Continue to monitor the [CDC's Travel Health Notices](#) and create a plan for supporting students and staff in affected areas. Consider plans for [restricting travel](#) to and from affected areas, recalling students and staff from affected areas, ensuring continuity of communications, and providing support for individuals returning to campus.
 - **Provide recommendations and up-to-date information for students who may consider traveling during school breaks.**
- **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 Guidance for [Workplaces and Employers](#) for more specific resources and information. Proactively provide alternatives for students who may need to miss classes due to quarantine or isolation activities to ensure their adherence to public health guidance and protocol

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does not impact their academic performance or opportunities. This may include options for distance learning, alternative exam dates, or other make-up options for missed coursework.

- **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 relationships with key community organizations and partners who may be impacted by your campus' closure.**
- **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 institution. 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.
- **Assess impacts to other services and on campus.** If your institution also operates a childcare facility, workforce center, health center, restaurant, religious services, and/or other social services, you will need to consider the impacts of an outbreak or closure on any individuals who are employed in these settings, or are customers, clients, patients, or utilizers of these services. See www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus for more specific guidance.

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 person.
 - Consider the impact of disease on staff and students that may be at higher risk for adverse health complications. Inform employees that some people may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as those over 60, immune-compromised or those with chronic medical conditions. Plan to accommodate their work.
- **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 including your email, university/college news, website, letters, and social media to share updates. Make sure to plan ahead for linguistic needs of the student population.
- **Communication with the larger community and other impacted individuals.** Once you have assessed the impacts to other services within your institution (e.g. onsite childcare), make sure you develop a specific communication outreach plan to ensure the individuals most impacted by your decision or closure receive the information they

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need. Proactively identify and meet any needs for language assistance through the translation of materials or interpretation services.

- **Maintain up to date information on your institution's website regarding procedures for access health facilities on campus.** If a staff member or student believes they should seek medical evaluation for COVID-19, it is important to place them in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask. If the student is seen in a student health services facility, ensure that they call the clinic prior to making the appointment. Make sure that the clinic is aware to immediately notify your LHJ if they think the student has COVID-19. Your LHJ will provide you with guidance.
- **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 students and staff to stay home and away from others.** Separate staff and students who become ill from others on campus. Send them home immediately. 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.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning.** Follow the institution's routine cleaning and disinfection program. Emphasize cleaning and disinfecting of all frequently touched surfaces, such as workstations, computer labs, shared equipment, classroom furniture, countertops, handrails, and doorknobs. Clean and maintain sports and recreational equipment and facilities on a regular basis.
- **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. Ensure that all classrooms and common areas around campus are well stocked with appropriate hygiene materials, including appropriate hand sanitizer at all entrances.

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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. 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 school, 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 associated with your institution in some way. Examples of social distancing include staggering class times or canceling large conferences 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 classes.** In general, facilities should only close or cancel classes if a student, staff member, or administrator has been diagnosed with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
 - Consider closing cancelling classes or closing 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 facilities for cleaning if there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 associated with the facility.
- **Assess alternative learning opportunities, such as web-based instruction, to assure continuity of instruction.** It is important to use an equity lens when making these plans.

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It may make more sense to cancel classes all together rather than deploying an alternative model that can be accessed by some, but not all, of your students.

Additional COVID-19 Resources

- [DOH Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) – updated information and resources daily
- [Resources for Higher Education Institutions](#)
- [Workplace and Employers](#)
- [Persons Who are at Higher Risk for Serious Illness](#)
- [Communities and Community Organizations](#)
- [Stigma Reduction](#)
- [How Can I Be Prepared for a COVID-19 Outbreak?](#)

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