

## Recommend or Order Closure of Public or Private Sites within Impacted Communities

Viruses quickly and easily spread in places where people gather in close contact, such as schools, child care facilities, workplaces, and public buildings. Dismissing or closing such facilities may be considered to limit disease spread by reducing the number of interpersonal contacts.

### Operational Strategy

Consider closure of schools, child care facilities, and institutions of higher education.

### Thresholds for Considering Implementation

#### THRESHOLD 1

Unmitigated or uncontained community transmission is occurring in several or many major US cities but there may not be evidence of community transmission in Washington yet. In such a circumstance, authorities should consider initiating minimally restrictive/burdensome, but effective, mitigation measures.

#### Recommendations to share with facilities:

- **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.** Ensure that people 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.** Review or update your emergency operations plan to include strategies to reduce the spread of disease and establish mechanisms for ongoing communication with staff, students, families, and the community. This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners.
- **Encourage sick individuals to stay home.** Facilities should direct all staff, students, families, and volunteers to self-screen and stay home if sick with coughing, sneezing, and/or fever.
  - If individuals have symptoms of fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, direct them to stay home for 10 days or 72 hours after fever resolution, whichever is longer.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning.** Facilities should maintain their routine cleaning and disinfection program. Emphasize cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- **Emphasize normally recommended actions to prevent the spread of disease.**
  - 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, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
  - Advising people 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.**
  - Clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Place signs in appropriate places.** As part of routine measures for the respiratory season, facilities should utilize existing signs. Signs should be visible that remind staff, visitors, and students to wash their

hands, sneeze/cough into their elbow or a tissue, put used tissues in the trash, and to wash hands immediately after using tissues. Recommend everyone avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes.

## **THRESHOLD 2**

Evidence that unmitigated or uncontained community transmission is occurring in WA State, but only in one or two jurisdictions, that cannot be contained.

### **Recommendations to share with facilities:**

- Continue all strategies under **Threshold 1**.
- Consider closure.
  - Facilities in impacted jurisdictions should consider closing schools and all extra-curricular activities for two weeks after identifying a cluster of community transmission, defined as 4 or more cases within a 1 mile radius of each other. Closures should be considered for facilities within a 5 mile radius of a cluster.
- Consider cancellation of activities and events.
- Early dismissal or closing facilities is a social distancing measure that may reduce face-to-face contact in community settings to reduce the spread of diseases transmitted by contact, droplets, or air. Choose social distancing measures depending on the severity of the disease.
- Assess the impacts of any recommendations you make on the families and students you serve. There are equity implications for any decisions that facilities may make, and the families and students you work with will be able to provide the best feedback and guidance on how to move forward in a student- and family-centered way.

## **THRESHOLD 3**

Evidence that unmitigated or uncontained community transmission of disease is occurring across WA State (in more than two large jurisdictions).

### **Recommendations:**

- Continue all strategies under **Threshold 2**.
- Enhance mass messaging to the population across the state on non-pharmaceutical interventions 1 through 7.
- Consider or order closures of schools, child care facilities, and institutions of higher education.
- Consider or order cancellation of activities and events at schools, child care facilities, and institutes of higher education.

## **Factors to Consider in Decision-Making**

### **Continuity of education**

- For schools and institutions of higher education, the academic year may need to be extended or delayed.
- A K-12 school- or district-wide emergency closure resulting from efforts to control an infectious disease outbreak would meet the definition of an emergency closure due to an unforeseen natural event, which would allow the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to waive school days under Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-129—Emergency School Closure. Additional information and guidance about emergency school closures is available on the OSPI website.

# Policy Considerations – Closure of Schools, Child Care Facilities, and Institutions of Higher Education

- Assess the feasibility of alternative learning opportunities.
  - Some schools and institutions of higher education may be in a position to maintain educational continuity for some programs using distance learning methods (web-based, sending home assignments, etc.). It is important to encourage the use of an equity lens when making these plans. School districts must ensure equal access to education for all students. It will likely make more sense to cancel classes and/or school district services rather than deploying a distance learning model that can be accessed by some, but not all, of your students.

## Impacts to parents and families

- School closures will result in the need for additional child care. However, child care facilities may also be considering closures or delays in service.
- Closures may disproportionately affect certain groups.
  - Families with parents or guardians that work full-time and/or have two or more jobs may struggle to find child care, creating the possibility that children will be unsupervised during school hours.
  - Families with low incomes may rely heavily on school food programs to feed their children during the day. These families may not be able to afford enough food for their families during the closure.
  - Older family members may be negatively impacted by taking over responsibilities for childcare while parents are working if children are exposed prior to being sent home.
  - Families and students that are experiencing homelessness may not have anywhere to go if normal operations of schools, child care facilities, and institutions of higher education are suspended. Some shelters have set hours that do not allow for individuals to remain in the shelter during the day.
- Adults and families may experience missed work and loss of income if they have to stay home to care for children.

## Impacts to students

- Institutions of higher education will need to make considerations for individuals studying or working abroad.
  - Direct institutions to continue to monitor the [CDC's Travel Health Notices](#) and create a plan for supporting students and staff in affected areas. Plans should consider 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.
  - Institutions should provide recommendations and up-to-date information for students who may consider travelling during school breaks.
- Students rely on meal services at schools, child care facilities, and at institutions of higher education.
  - Approximately 43 percent of K-12 students rely on breakfast and lunch provided through the school system, and a smaller percentage also rely on schools and school programs for dinner.
    - Continuity of food services, particularly for our most vulnerable students and families, is an important consideration. Consider students who rely on school meals

when assessing the need for school closures. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program, operate through group feeding sites. During major outbreaks, USDA may allow waivers to certain requirements.

- Institutions of higher education may need additional guidance to assist in contingency planning for students who depend on student housing and food services.
- Provision of education for students with disabilities.
  - In the event of extended school closures, school districts remain responsible for the free appropriate public education of its students eligible for special education services with an individualized education program. Districts will want to plan how they will continue to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### **Impacts to employees:**

- Delayed or extended school year may have a negative financial impact on staff who have summer jobs to supplement their income.
- Delayed or extended school year may have a negative impact on staff ability to obtain continuing education units over the summer months.

### **If schools, child care facilities, or institutions of higher education are closed or dismissed, consider the following additional steps:**

- Provide education to discourage students, staff, and employees from gathering in alternative locations.
- Consider alternatives for ensuring that students receive necessary medical and social services.

## **Tactics to Reduce Impacts**

- Be familiar with the landscape of schools, child care facilities, and institutions of higher education in your local health jurisdiction. Example types of facilities include:
  - K-12
  - Institutions of higher education
  - Charter schools
  - Private schools
  - Residential schools
  - Proprietary schools
  - Tribal schools
  - Child care facilities
  - Youth programs and services
  - Early learning programs
  - Head Start
  - Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)
  - Co-located sites and/or programs (e.g. extension sites, child care programs, etc.)
- Engage with facilities to understand their infectious disease outbreak plans.
- Ensure schools, child care facilities, and institutions of higher education are tied to your local emergency alert and notification systems.
- Create plans to communicate accurate and timely information to your jurisdiction.

## Additional COVID-19 Resources

- [DOH Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) – updated information and resources daily
- [Local Health Jurisdictions](#)
- [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?](#)