

Guidance for schools which do NOT have COVID-19 identified in their community

To prepare for possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for schools to do now is **plan and prepare**. As the global outbreak evolves, schools should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks. Schools want to **be ready** if COVID-19 does appear in their communities.

Childcare and K-12 school administrators nationwide can take steps to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19:

Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).

This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners. Focus on the components, or annexes, of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks.

- Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). Effective strategies build on everyday school policies and practices.
- Ensure the plan emphasizes common-sense preventive actions for students and staff. For example, emphasize actions such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often.
 - CDC has workplace resources such as posters with messages for staff about [staying home when sick](#) and how to [avoid spreading germs at work](#).
 - Other health and education professional organizations may also have helpful resources your school can use or share. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics provides information on [germ prevention strategies](#) and [reducing the spread of illness in childcare settings](#).
- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
 - 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](#).
- Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing the EOP:
 - Multiple federal agencies have developed resources on school planning principles and a 6-step process for creating plans to build and continually foster safe and healthy school communities *before, during, and after* possible emergencies. Key resources include [guidance on developing high-quality school emergency operations planspdf iconexternal icon](#), and a [companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality school emergency operations](#).
 - The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA to schools and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

Develop information-sharing systems with partners.

- Information-sharing systems can be used for day-to-day reporting (on information such as changes in absenteeism) and disease surveillance efforts to detect and respond to an outbreak.
- Local health officials should be a key partner in information sharing.

Monitor and plan for absenteeism.

- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your school among both students and staff.
- Alert local health officials about large increases in student and staff absenteeism, particularly if absences appear due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the "flu," which have symptoms similar to symptoms of COVID-19).
- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
- Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
- Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.

Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school.

- Establish procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible.
- Keep sick students and staff separate from well students and staff until they can leave.
- Remember that 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 more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.
- Share resources with the school community to help families understand when to keep children home. This guidance, not specific to COVID-19, from the American Academy of Pediatrics can be helpful for [families](#).

Perform routine environmental cleaning.

- Schools should continue performing routine cleaning. Specific high-risk locations warrant cleaning and disinfection at least daily. Please see the Interim Cleaning and Disinfection Guidance for Primary and Secondary Schools for COVID-19 issued by the New York State Department of Health.

Create communications plans for use with the school community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and their families.
- Include information about steps being taken by the school or childcare facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.

Review CDC's guidance for businesses and employers.

- Review this CDC [guidance](#) to identify any additional strategies the school can use, given its role as an employer.

Childcare and K-12 administrators can also support their school community by sharing resources with students (if resources are age-appropriate), their families, and staff. Coordinate with local health officials to determine what type of information might be best to share with the school community.

Consider sharing the following fact sheets and information sources:

- Information about COVID-19 available through [state](#) and [localexternal icon](#) health departments
- General CDC fact sheets to help staff and students' families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
 - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19](#)
- CDC Information on [COVID-19 and children](#)
- CDC information for staff, students, and their families who have recently traveled back to the United States from areas where CDC has identified community spread of coronavirus:
 - A list of countries where community spread of COVID-19 is occurring can be found on the CDC webpage: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#)

For questions about students who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC's [FAQ for travelers](#). Schools can also consult with state and local health officials. Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials. COVID-19 information for travel is updated regularly on the CDC [website](#).



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