

COVID-19: Guidance for Schools and Institutions of Higher Education

The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) is monitoring closely the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. Current information suggests that person-to-person spread will continue to occur and more cases might be identified in the United States, including in Chicago. CDPH's goal is to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in Chicago by detecting new cases quickly, minimizing transmission and developing guidance to prepare communities to respond.

The following interim guidance is intended for schools and institutions of higher education (IHE) and may help administrators prevent exposures to all acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19.

Recommended Strategies for Schools to Use Now

- **Actively encourage sick students and employees to stay home:**
 - Students and staff who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to school until they are free of fever (100.4°F) for at least 24 hours.
 - Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that students and employees are aware of these policies.
 - Talk with companies that provide contract services about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
 - Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member.
- **Separate sick students and employees and send them home immediately.**
 - Sick students and employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- **Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all students and employees:**
 - Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your school and in other areas where they are likely to be seen.
 - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles.
 - Instruct students and employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
 - Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the school. Note: Small children should only use hand sanitizers under adult supervision. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers has raised concerns about eye contamination, skin reactions, alcohol poisoning, and flammability.
 - Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs for employees in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning:**
 - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the school. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
 - No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
 - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down before each use.
- **Consider postponing or canceling student foreign exchange programs:**
 - Consider asking current program participants to return to their home country. Those overseeing student foreign exchange programs should be aware that students may face unpredictable circumstances, travel restrictions, challenges in returning home or accessing health care while abroad.

- Consider asking students participating in study abroad programs to return to the United States. Determine the best approach for when and how (e.g., chartered transportation for countries or areas assessed as high-risk for exposure) your study abroad students might return. All plans for returning study abroad students should be designed to protect participants from stigma and discrimination.
- Evaluate the risks associated with choosing to maintain programs abroad and take the appropriate proactive measures. Schools that choose to continue to maintain programs abroad should monitor [cdc.gov/COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID-19) for additional information.
- Students returning from countries with a [Travel Alert Level 3](#) may face some limitations on their movement and activity. Please follow instructions during this time. For more information see CDPH's latest movement guidance at www.chicago.gov/coronavirus.
- **Advise employees before traveling to check** the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which they will travel.

Planning for a Possible COVID-19 Outbreak in Chicago

Update your existing emergency operations plan:

- **Meet with your emergency operations coordinator or planning team to develop or update your emergency operations plan.** Review all aspects of your school, such as personnel, systems, services, and other resources. Make preparations for key prevention strategies.
- **Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders.** Clearly define each partner's role, responsibilities, and decision-making authority.

Update your emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information. Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, staff, students, suppliers, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the communication chain. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, and a website to help disseminate information to those inside and outside your school.

Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating information to staff and students.

Promote the daily practice of *everyday preventive actions* at all times. Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources, such as your local public health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Provide respiratory illness prevention supplies in your school. Have supplies on hand for staff and students, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, and trash baskets.

- *Note: Keep hand sanitizers out of reach of small children. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers has raised concerns about eye contamination, skin reactions, alcohol poisoning, and flammability. Small children should only use hand sanitizers under adult supervision.*

Plan for staff and student absences. Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies for students and staff. Staff may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to planning for holiday staffing).

Identify space that can be used to separate sick people (if possible). Designate a space for sick staff and students who cannot leave school immediately. If possible, designate a nearby separate bathroom just for sick people. Develop a plan for cleaning the room daily.

- *For IHE: Work with key partners and stakeholders to identify ways to separate sick students from those who are well. Consider relocating sick students to other housing areas or the student health center. Make plans to send sick students home if they live nearby. Include strategies for housing and caring for international students who become sick.*

Plan ways to increase the space between people or limit face-to-face contact between people at school. Several ways to do this include moving desks farther apart, leaving empty seats between students, dividing classes into smaller groups, holding outdoor classes, and canceling school-related group meetings and activities.

- *For Childcare Programs: Young children may not be able to communicate when something is wrong. Develop a plan for identifying children who get sick during the school day. Offer childcare providers a “refresher” training on how to recognize respiratory illness signs and symptoms in children.*

Review your process for planning school events. Identify actions to take if you need to postpone or cancel events, such as sporting and special events. Consider limiting access to school campuses by non-essential visitors.

Plan ways to continue providing education and other essential services. Consider all available platforms for education instruction and delivery of supplemental services, including meal, health, and social services.

- *For IHE: Think creatively to identify solutions for minimizing students gathering in the cafeteria area. For example, establish a “food delivery” approach for sick students. Create an online menu to allow sick students to order food without leaving their dorm room. Arrange for food to be delivered directly to them by cafeteria staff, roommates, or other students.*

Fight stigma and fear by supporting people who are coming back to school or work after completing their quarantine or isolation period for COVID-19 exposure or illness.

- Someone who has completed their quarantine or met the requirements to discontinue infection control measures does not pose a risk of spreading COVID-19.
- People who have not been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case are not at greater risk of acquiring and spreading this new virus than others.
- People who returned more than 14 days ago from areas where COVID-19 is active and do not have symptoms of coronavirus do not put others at risk.

Help fight fear by letting people know that being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19.

- Viruses cannot target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds.
- People of Asian descent, including Chinese Americans, are not more likely to get coronavirus than anyone else.

For more information on **how schools and colleges/universities can prepare and respond to COVID-19**, see CDC’s [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools](#) and CDC’s [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Institutions of Higher Education](#).

For more information on **Chicago’s COVID-19 response**, please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus, email coronavirus@chicago.gov, or call **312-746-4835**.

This version was released on 03/03/2020. It may be updated with new guidance. Please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus to find the latest version.