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FROM: California Department of Education  
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TO: County Offices of Education  
County District Superintendents  
Charter School Administrators  
Local Education Departments

CC: County Public Health Departments

DATE: March 7, 2020

SUBJECT: School Guidance on Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The California Department of Public Health (CDPH), in consultation with the California Department of Education (CDE), will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

This document is intended to be statewide guidance to help both school and public health officials inform their decision making. Decisions by school officials and local public health officials should be determined by the specific circumstances in local jurisdictions.

## Background

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel virus that has been spreading worldwide. Community-acquired cases have now been confirmed in California. We are gaining more understanding of COVID-19's epidemiology, clinical course, immunogenicity, and other factors as time progresses, and the situation is changing daily. CDPH is in the process of monitoring COVID-19, conducting testing with local and federal partners, and providing guidance and resources to prevent, detect and respond to the occurrence of COVID-19 cases in California.

At this time, community transmission of COVID-19 has occurred in California. Educational institutions should prepare for possible impacts of COVID-19 and take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as other infectious diseases, including influenza and gastroenteritis.



## Illness Severity

The complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is not fully understood. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild to severe, including illness resulting in death. Older people and people with certain underlying health conditions like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example, seem to be at greater risk of serious illness.

Below CDPH and CDE have outlined four (4) scenarios that should be considered by each school and partner organization serving students in order to protect students, families, and staff.

### Scenario I: Measures already underway to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Pursuant to prior guidance released, school administrators have or should immediately take steps to slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19. CDPH has recommended implementing the following steps:

- Review and update comprehensive school safety plans, including continuity plans for teaching and learning if students are absent from school.
- Exclude students, teachers, or staff who have a travel history over the course of the last 14 days to an area identified by the CDC as Level 3 Travel Health Notice ([see Evaluating and Reporting Persons Under Investigation by the CDC](#)). Additionally, exclude those who have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 from the school for 14 days from the day of their last exposure.
- Send students, teachers, and staff who present with fever and/or respiratory infection symptoms home immediately. Separate them from others until they go home. When feasible, identify a “sick room” through which others do not regularly pass.
- Coordinate with all partner organizations serving students to ensure consistent practices.
- Encourage flu vaccine for those persons over 6 months of age who have not had it this season.
- Develop a plan to communicate with the school community.
- Contact your county emergency operations center if it has been established or your local public health department immediately if you notice any concerning clusters of respiratory disease or spikes in absenteeism. For contact information, please search the local public health department website.

- Encourage all students, families, and staff to take everyday preventive actions:
  - Stay home when sick.
    - Remain at home until fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
    - Seek immediate medical care if symptoms become more severe, e.g., high fever or difficulty breathing.
  - Use “respiratory etiquette.”
    - Cover cough with a tissue or sleeve. See [CDC’s Cover Your Cough page](#) for multilingual posters and flyers, posted at the bottom of webpage.
    - Provide adequate supplies within easy reach, including tissues and no-touch trash cans.
  - Wash hands frequently.
    - Encourage hand washing by students and staff through education, scheduled time for handwashing, and the provision of adequate supplies.
  - Enhance cleaning consistent with CDC guidance (see [Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)).

**Scenario II: Measures to be taken if there are two or more community transmission cases of COVID-19, but no individuals within the school test positive.**

If the local public health department has confirmed **two or more** community transmission cases, but no individuals (staff or students) at the school have tested positive for COVID-19, in addition to the items outlined in Phase I, CDPH recommends school administrators implement the following steps:

- Teachers and staff with any fever and/or respiratory infection symptoms should not come to work. Teachers and staff should self- screen (i.e., check themselves for subjective fever and/or respiratory symptoms such as cough) for respiratory infection symptoms each morning before interacting with students.
  - Ensure sick leave policies for those allow teachers and staff to stay home if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.

- Limit visitors to the school by not allowing those with symptoms of fever and/or respiratory infection or who have a travel history over the course of the last 14 days to an area identified by the CDC as Level 3 Travel Health Notice.
- Consider alternates to congregate or group programming within the school including any large or communal activities such as assemblies. Alternate approaches which limit close contact may include conducting assemblies via webcasts or intercom announcements.
- Consider implementing staggered recess times to limit the number of students who are together; and if possible, group recess by classrooms.
- Consider relaxing requirements for a doctor's note for the child to return to school after illness.

**Scenario III: Measures to be taken if one student, teacher or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 and exposed others at the school.**

If one student, teacher or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 and exposed others at the school, CDPH recommends that school administrators implement the following steps:

- In consultation with the local public health department, the appropriate school official may consider if school closure is warranted and length of time based on the risk level within the specific community as determined by the local public health officer.
- In consultation with the local public health department, school officials may determine readmission criteria after the school closures.
- Implement communication plans for school closure to include outreach to students, parents, teachers, staff, and the community.
  - Include information for parents regarding labor laws, information regarding Disability Insurance, Paid Family Leave, and Unemployment Insurance.
  - California Labor and Workforce Development Guidance:
    1. [Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\) Resources for Employers and Workers](#)
    2. The California Employment Development Department's [Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\) web page](#)
  - [California Labor Commissioner's Office FAQs](#)

- Closing schools is a difficult decision as it has impacts on families and employers. The state will continue to assess the situation and provide information as needed.
- Provide guidance to parents, teachers and staff reminding them of the importance of community social distancing measures while school is closed, including discouraging students or staff from gathering elsewhere. Community social distancing measures include canceling group activities or events, religious services, after-school classes and sporting events.
- Consider developing a plan for continuity of education, medical and social services, and meal programs and establish alternate mechanisms for these to continue.
  - Meal programs can continue to offer meals when school is closed. More information is available on the CDE's [Nutrition What's New web page](#).
- Maintain regular communications with the local public health department.
- Consult CDC guidelines (see [Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)) for schools to determine what additional cleaning protocols, if any, should be deployed at the school prior to reopening the school.
- Determine the timing of return of students and staff, and any additional steps needed for the school to reopen, in consultation with the local public health department.

**Scenario IV: Measures to be taken if multiple schools within a school district have a student, teacher or staff member test positive for COVID-19.**

If multiple schools within the school district have a student, teacher or staff member test positive for COVID-19, the school administrator should consult with local public health officials for guidance on additional school closures.

If it is determined that all schools within the school district should be closed for instruction, CDPH recommends the following:

- In consultation with the local public health department, the school administrator may determine if additional school closures and what length of time is warranted based on the risk level within the specific community as determined by the local public health officer.
- Develop communication plans for school closure to include outreach to students, parents, teachers, staff, and the community.
- Provide guidance to parents, teachers and staff reminding them of the importance

of community social distancing measures while school is closed, including discouraging students or staff from gathering elsewhere. Community social distancing measures include canceling group activities or events, religious services, after-school classes and sporting events.

- Consider developing a plan for continuity of education, medical and social services, and meal programs and establish alternate mechanisms for these to continue.
- Maintain regular communications with the local public health department.
- Work with the local public health department to determine what additional cleaning protocols, if any, should be deployed at the school prior to reopening the school.
- Determine the timing of return of students and staff, and any additional steps needed for the school to reopen, in consultation with the local public health department.

The CDE and CDPH would urge schools to ensure students' and staffs' privacy to help prevent discrimination or unnecessary stigmatization. For additional information or questions regarding medically fragile populations, programs, or funding implications, please contact the CDE.

#### **Additional Resources.**

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website](#)
- [California Department of Public Health Website](#)