
MA DPH ADVISORY COVID-19

 Veronica Webb Barrett

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Novel Coronavirus for schools

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Dear School Administrator,

We are writing to you today with information and guidance regarding infection caused by the new coronavirus, now known as COVID-19, first identified in Wuhan, China in late December 2019.

At this time, Massachusetts has one confirmed case of COVID-19 and the risk to our residents remains low. At the same time, the risk for the influenza virus is very high.

The vast majority of reported cases of COVID-19 are in China. Confirmed cases of this respiratory virus associated with travel from Wuhan are also being reported in a growing number of countries, including the United States. Some person-to-person spread of this virus outside China has been detected but, again, the risk to Massachusetts residents remains low at this time.

We know that outbreaks of new virus infections are always of public health concern. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), other federal agencies, local boards of health, and our clinical partners to share the most up to date information available.

It is important to note that Massachusetts residents are much more likely to become sick with a cold or the flu than to be exposed to COVID-19. Many of the precautions that help prevent colds and the flu can help protect against other respiratory viruses.

Please share this with your school nurse and other school health personnel.

Recommended guidance

As of this writing, it is **extremely unlikely** that anyone with travel to mainland China within the past 14 days would be at school. As of February 3, 2020, travelers from mainland China are arriving into the U.S. at 11 airports (not including Logan airport in Boston) and are being screened upon entry. Travelers who are ill or who have traveled in the high-risk area of Hubei Province are being quarantined at the point of entry. Travelers from other parts of China without symptoms are being told to stay at home for 14 days from day of arrival.

If students, staff or volunteers do come to the nurse's office with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from China in the last 14 days OR are ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND had recent close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case or had recent close contact with someone under investigation by public health authorities for COVID-19, these are guidelines to follow:

- Place the individual in a private room, ask them to wear a face mask and close the door.

- Ask the individual about symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, difficulty breathing). Other symptoms could include: chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. If you are in the same room as the individual, wear a face mask and stand at least 6 feet away.
- If the individual requires immediate medical care, call 911 for an ambulance, inform EMS of the individual's recent travel to China.
- Call the DPH Epidemiology Line at 617-983-6800 or your local board of health for additional guidance.

The precautions to help prevent colds and the flu can help protect against COVID-19.

DPH recommends that schools continue education about good hygiene. Students, staff, and volunteers should be reminded to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, if unable to wash, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve (not with your hands)
- Stay away from people who are sick and stay home when you are sick

Schools should follow their regular cleaning and disinfection program.

- Clean hard surfaces (desks, tables, countertops, sinks). Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (door handles, faucets, railings), bathrooms and health rooms. Use alcohol wipes to clean keyboards.
- Use a disinfectant labeled "EPA-Approved" to clean all high touch surfaces and patient care areas.
- Clean the surface first to remove all organic matter. Thorough cleaning with soap and water will remove most microorganisms.
- Custodial staff is trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills.

For more information

DPH has created a website updated constantly with the latest guidance, including printable fact sheets in multiple languages. Visit: www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus.

For questions, call the DPH Epidemiology Line at 24 hours a day/7 days a week at 617-983-6800.

For more, visit the CDC website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Thank you for your help to keep our students and school personnel healthy and safe .

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