

## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information for Schools

February 29, 2020

People at schools, colleges, and universities within New Hampshire are concerned about how the current outbreak of COVID-19 will impact their communities and are seeking ways to stay healthy. The New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (NH DPHS) is working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support our schools by developing guidance and education materials.

### **What is the difference between seasonal coronaviruses and the virus causing COVID-19 and how is it spread?**

Coronaviruses are a family of closely related viruses. Some coronaviruses cause the common cold but the virus causing COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that we believe moved from animals into humans and is infecting people for the first time. This virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets such as occur when an infected person coughs. Risk for transmission between people is highest with close contact (e.g., family members, healthcare settings).

### **What are common symptoms of COVID-19 and how is it prevented or treated?**

For confirmed COVID-19 cases, reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. Symptoms typically include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent infection with this virus, and there is no specific antiviral treatment recommended once infected. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

### **How should schools, colleges and universities prepare for the potential of COVID-19 in their communities?**

- Continue to monitor information from public health. See key websites at the end of this document.
- Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans. See CDC guidance below.
- Actively encourage sick students, staff, and volunteers to stay home and emphasize respiratory etiquette and frequent hand hygiene by all.
  - [CDC stay home when sick posters](#)
  - [CDC Handwashing posters](#)
  - [NH DPHS posters](#) (at bottom of page)
- Residential schools should consider identifying a place where an ill student(s) can safely reside apart, if necessary. This should be a single room with access to private bathroom.
- Perform routine and frequent environmental cleaning, especially of commonly touched surfaces.
- Create communications plans, including strategies for sharing information with staff, volunteers, students, and their families. Consider proactive communications now. See examples at the end of this document.
- Prepare for possible increased numbers of student and employee absences.
- Identify essential functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements to maintain school operations.
- Plan to minimize exposure between people if public health officials call for social distancing (e.g. consider student seating arrangements to allow for the greatest distance possible between students, implement distance learning, etc.)

Review CDC COVID-19 guidance for schools: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>

Review NH DPHS and CDC guidance for businesses and other organizations to help prepare for community transmission of COVID-19: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/documents/covid-19-businesses.pdf>

### **What preventive measures can school, college and university community members take to help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses?**

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not to share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. Remain home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (without fever-reducing medication) or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance), and respiratory symptoms are improving.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

### **What precautions should be taken for students, staff, and volunteers who traveled internationally?**

School, college and university community members should avoid all travel to any locations for which CDC has issued a Level 3 travel notice. Given the rapidly evolving outbreak and frequently changing travel advisories, schools should also consider postponing any nonessential travel to countries with a Level 2 travel advisory. See CDC travel notice website: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>

Students, staff, and volunteers who have returned from mainland China are being monitored by public health authorities and must stay home for 14 days after their arrival. For residential schools, this period of quarantine should be in a private room with private bath, and ideally a direct exit (rather than exit through common areas).

Students, staff, and volunteers who have returned from other locations with travel notices for COVID-19 may continue to attend work and school. They are not being monitored by public health authorities so they should be counseled to remain alert for fever or respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath). If symptoms develop the individual should:

- Take their temperature with a thermometer
- Stay home and avoid close contact with other people
- Seek health advice by phone from either a healthcare provider or the NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after hours 603-271-5300).
- Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, the individual should call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Symptomatic individuals should wear a surgical mask when traveling outside of the home (e.g., to a doctor's office) to protect others.

See informational handout on self-observation that can be provided to travelers at the end of this document.

### **What should be done for those who become sick at school?**

If students, staff or volunteers come to the nurse's office or health services with a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other respiratory symptoms AND have traveled from any locations with any travel notices for COVID-19 in the 14 days prior to symptom onset OR had recent close contact with a person suspected to be infected with COVID-19, do the following:

- Avoid close contact (i.e., avoid being within 6 feet of the individual).

- Place a face mask on the individual, put them in a private room, and close the door.
- Ask the individual about symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath). Other symptoms could include: chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, and less commonly gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea.
- Minimize contact, but if you must be in the same room as the individual, wear a face mask and gloves and stand at least 6 feet away. If your school provides health services and/or has access to personal protective equipment (PPE), every attempt should be made to don all recommended PPE for suspected COVID-19 patients, including those for airborne, droplet, and contact precautions (i.e. N95 respirator, eye protection, gloves, gown and mask).
- If the individual requires immediate medical care, call 911 for an ambulance and inform emergency medical services about the individual's recent travel.
- Call NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after-hours 603-271-5300) for additional guidance.

### **What will happen if a person in our school is diagnosed with COVID-19?**

If a student, staff member, or volunteer in your school is diagnosed with COVID-19, NH DPHS will work very closely with your school to identify close contacts of the person diagnosed and to coordinate messaging to your school community. NH DPHS will make recommendations for monitoring of close contacts, which will depend on the epidemiology of COVID-19 in the state at that time.

### **At what point will NH DPHS consider closing a school or cancelling school events due to COVID-19?**

Preemptive school dismissals can be used to disrupt transmission of influenza by reducing close contact before many students and staff members become ill. During a dismissal, the school facilities are kept open, which allows teachers to develop and deliver lessons and materials, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning. Decisions around whether or not to implement school closure and event cancellation strategies would be highly dependent on the epidemiology of COVID-19 in New Hampshire and would involve many considerations that balance potential benefits against potential harms. We cannot predict how COVID-19 will occur here in New Hampshire. While the hope is that community transmission will be limited and that school closures would never be required, NH DPHS recommends that schools take steps to review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching and learning, in the event that a school closure is necessary for COVID-19.

### **What cleaning supplies and practices should be used for COVID-19?**

Schools, colleges and universities should routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces such as desks, tables, chairs and doorknobs. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time. Use cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down before each use.

### **What information can we provide to children about COVID-19?**

Two resources that may be helpful in talking to children about COVID-19 are listed below:

- [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- [Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](#)

### **Where can I go for the most up-to-date information about the COVID-19 outbreak?**

Outbreaks involving COVID-19 evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information:

- U.S. CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>
- NH DPHS website: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

## **Sample Letter for Schools to Parents and Guardians with General Prevention Information**

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are writing to provide you an update about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). There have been no cases of COVID-19 yet identified in New Hampshire; however, it is important for all of us to make sure we are taking precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illness, such as the flu, which we frequently see this time of year.

COVID-19 and many other common respiratory viruses spread through contact with an infected person's respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends that individuals engage in everyday preventive measures to help stop the spread of germs and avoid illness, such as:

- Teach your children to wash their hands. Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Teach your children to cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash. It is also recommended to cough or sneeze into their elbow if a tissue is not available.
- Teach your children to avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Keep sick children at home. Children should stay at home for at least 24 hours after the last signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Those who have a constant cough should stay home until medicine relieves it. Any child that is sick at school should go home.
- Report your child's absence to the nurse. If your child is out sick with illness, please let the nurse know.
- Teach your child not to share personal items like their food or water bottles.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces within your home.

In addition to these personal prevention measures, our school families should avoid all travel to any locations for which CDC has issued a Level 3 travel notice: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. Travel to other countries outside of the U.S. should be discussed with the family's healthcare provider.

According to the health department, people who have returned from mainland China are being monitored by public health authorities and must stay home for 14 days after their travel. People who have returned from other locations with travel notices for COVID-19 may continue to attend work and school. Travelers that develop symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, or shortness of breath), should:

- Take their temperature with a thermometer.
- Stay home and avoid close contact with other people.
- Seek health advice by phone from either a healthcare provider or the NH Division of Public Health Services at 603-271-4496 (after-hours: 603-271-5300).
- Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- If available, wear a surgical mask when traveling outside of the home (e.g. to a doctor's office)

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- NH DPHS website: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

Sincerely,

[School administrator's name and signature]

## **Sample Letter for College and University Community with General Prevention Information**

Dear Community,

We are writing to provide you an update about the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19). There have been no cases of COVID-19 yet identified in New Hampshire, however, it is important for all of us to make sure we are taking precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illness, such as the flu, which we frequently see this time of year.

COVID-19, 19 and many other common respiratory viruses spread through contact with an infected person's respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends that individuals engage in everyday preventive measures to help stop the spread of germs and avoid illness, such as:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not to share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. The CDC recommends that individuals remain home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

In addition to these personal prevention measures, school, college and university community members should avoid all travel to any locations for which CDC has issued a Level 3 travel notice. See CDC travel notice website: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. Travel to other countries outside of the U.S. should be discussed with an individual's healthcare provider.

According to the health department, people who have returned from mainland China are being monitored by public health authorities and must stay home for 14 days after their travel. People who have returned from other locations with travel notices for COVID-19 may continue to attend work and school. If you develop symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, or shortness of breath), you should:

- Take your temperature with a thermometer.
- Stay home and avoid close contact with other people.
- Seek health advice by phone from either a healthcare provider or the NH Division of Public Health Services at 603-271-4496 (after-hours 603-271-5300).
- Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- If available, wear a surgical mask when traveling outside of the home (e.g. to a doctor's office)

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Sincerely,

[School administrator's name and signature]

## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Self-Observation Guide

If you are returning to the United States from a country other than China with a [travel advisory](#) for COVID-19, the New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) strongly recommends you protect yourself and others by following these steps for **self-observation**.

1. Remain alert for respiratory symptoms (cough or shortness of breath) and fever.
2. If you feel feverish or develop a cough or shortness of breath:
  - Take your temperature.
  - Limit contact with others.
  - Seek health advice. Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room call ahead and tell the provider or office about your recent travel and symptoms.
3. Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hygiene including covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap is not available.

### Additional things you can do to keep yourself and others healthy are:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. Remain home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (without taking fever-reducing medication) or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Outbreaks involving COVID-19 evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information:

- U.S. CDC website
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