

COVID-19 Guidance: PK-12 School Administrators

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Planning guidance for PK12 schools

As the number of COVID-19 cases in Iowa increases, schools should take steps to protect the health of their students, staff and community. This guidance will assist you with proactive measures now to reduce your risk and plan for decisions that may be made in the event COVID-19 directly impacts your community or school. Any decisions regarding school dismissal or event cancellations will be made in coordination with local school districts, local public health officials, the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Public Health.

School-related Travel or Student, Staff-member Travel

- CDC is currently recommending that schools postpone or cancel all [international trips](#).
- Schools should consider postponing or canceling [trips within an affected area](#) that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Schools should consult with IDPH or their local health department to discuss the [COVID-19 risk associated with specific travel locations](#).
- Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow [guidance from public health to voluntarily self-isolate](#).

Responding to Confirmed COVID-19 Cases

- Schools will be contacted by public health officials if a student, student family member or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19 and action is required by the school.**
- IDPH or local public health will recommend the best course of action based on the situation and the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 in the community.**
- Local health officials will work with the school to communicate the possible COVID-19 exposure as needed.** This communication to the school community should align with the communication plan in the school's emergency operations plan. In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality.
- If a child or staff member has been identified with COVID-19, local health officials will determine when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community.**
- In addition, students and staff who are well but are taking care of or share a home with someone with a case of COVID-19 should follow instructions from local health officials to determine when to return to school.

School Dismissals or Cancellations

- Upon confirmation of community spread by local public health officials and IDPH, school dismissals or cancellations in impacted communities may be implemented.**
- Decisions about school dismissal or cancellation of school events should be made in coordination with the Iowa Department of Public Health and local public health.**
- Dismissal and event cancellation decisions should be considered on a case-by-case basis using information from health officials about the local conditions.
- IDPH will be providing information regarding the definition of community spread in the coming days.

Planning & Preparation

Review, update, and implement emergency plans in cooperation with local partners:

- Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza) and 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 (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).
- Share your emergency plans with local partners (e.g., local public health and local emergency management) and ensure your plans outline how regular information sharing will occur.
- Share your emergency plan with local preschool community partners.

Monitor and plan for absenteeism.

- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your school among both students and staff.
- Report greater than 10% absenteeism due to illness to public health through established channels or by entering the information into the online reporting system at: <https://redcap.idph.state.ia.us/surveys/?s=C4XNALH3R9>
- 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 or preschool program) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps with school officials.
- 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 <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/When-to-Keep-Your-Child-Home-from-Child-Care.aspx>

Perform routine environmental cleaning.

- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, countertops) with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down by students and staff before each use.
- Please consider students when cleaning in close proximity who may or may not have chronic health conditions associated with sensitivity to smells or airborne irritants affecting major life activities.

Create communications plans for use with the school community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and their families (CDC Resource: [Talking to Children about COVID-19](#); IDPH Resource: [COVID-19 Schools](#)).
- Include information about steps being taken by the school or childcare facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.
- Include planning for communicating standardized messages in collaboration with public health and the department of education.

Planning and Communication Resources

Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing emergency plans.

- 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 plans](#), and a [companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality school emergency operations plans](#).
- The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#) contains free resources, training, and TA to schools and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

Childcare and PK-12 administrators can also support their school community by sharing resources with students (if resources are age-appropriate), their families, and staff.

- General fact sheets to help staff and students' families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves are available from:
 - IDPH: <https://idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus>
 - CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>