2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Guidance for Schools

Stanislaus County Health Services Agency – Public Health Division

Updated on 3.4.2020

Dear Administrators, Teachers, and Staff,

Stanislaus County Health Services Agency – Public Health Division is offering this resource to provide information about Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). This guidance is intended for administrators at public and private childcare programs and K-12 schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It is based on the directives from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)](#) and what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19. We will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

To prepare for possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for schools to do now is plan and prepare. As the global outbreak evolves, schools should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks. Schools should be ready if COVID-19 does appear in their communities.

What is Coronavirus Disease? (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus, and we are learning more about it every day. Diseases from coronaviruses in people typically cause mild to moderate illness, like the common cold. COVID-19 symptoms are very similar to the flu, including:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

In some cases, COVID-19 can cause more severe respiratory illness. At this time, there is **no vaccine** to protect against COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping transmission (spread) of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy. **We currently do not have a confirmed case in Stanislaus County.**

Like other respiratory illnesses, such as influenza, human coronaviruses most commonly spread to others from an infected person through:

- Coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as caring for an infected person
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands

COVID-19 is new, and we are learning more each day about how it spreads and how long it takes for people to become sick. As information becomes available, we will keep you informed. **Do not assume that someone (visiting) from a country with an outbreak is likely to have coronavirus**.

For updated local information, please visit [Stanislaus County Health Services Agency website](#).

Do school events need to be canceled?

Currently, there is no need to cancel school or social events. There are no restrictions on public gatherings. Parents, guardians, staff and students should be reminded that part of good health hygiene is staying home from events when they are ill.

How is Public Health implementing the directives and how will schools be informed?

School administrators will be informed by Public Health if there is an identified case of Coronavirus in their school community that resulted in exposures at the school. Childcare and K-12 administrators can also support their school community by sharing resources with students (if resources are age-appropriate), their families, and staff. Coordinate with Public Health to determine what type of information might be best to share with the school community.

If there is a case confirmed at your campus, Public Health Officer will inform the school principal and superintendent. Public Health staff will work with the designated staff from the school to identify who was in contact with the infected person and to begin the process of tracking and monitoring contacts. Public Health will collaborate with schools to develop messaging for communication to the school community.

What is the school responsible for?

- Monitor and plan for absenteeism
- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your school among both students and staff
    - Alert public health officials about large increases in student and staff absenteeism, particularly if absences appear due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the "flu," which have symptoms similar to symptoms of COVID-19)
    - 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 member.
        - Schools may consider waiving attendance related polices such as School Attendance Review Board (SARB) for absences related to COVID-19
    - 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
- If a student is found to be sick and is required to restrict their activities, including attending school, we ask that schools help minimize the impact on the student's academic success, and offer opportunities for the students to study independently at their home or a quarantine location
- If an employee is required to restrict their activities, we request that schools extend or adapt policies to provide paid leave for such employees
- In the unusual event that a child or staff member is identified who
    - recently traveled from an area of the world experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19 and
    - has symptoms of respiratory illness, such as fever and cough
    that person should be sent home and the school should immediately contact the Public Health Division

Who do I Contact for more information

For most up-to-date guidelines on COVID-19, please visit CDC's Coronavirus Website
For local information, please call **(209) 558-7535**

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY
Stanislaus County

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What can schools do to prepare for it?

Even though we don't have a case currently, our recommendation is that schools should plan and prepare for a possible community transmission of COVID-19. School administrators can take steps to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19:

- **Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).** This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners. Focus on the components, or annexes, of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks
  - Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). Effective strategies 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
  - CDC has workplace resources such as posters with messages for staff about <u>staying home when sick</u> icon and <u>how to avoid spreading germs at work</u>
  - Other health and education professional organizations may also have helpful resources your school can use or share. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics provides <u>information on germ prevention strategies</u> and <u>reducing the spread of illness in childcare settings</u>
  - Ensure handwashing strategies 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
    - CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include <u>health promotion materials</u>, information on <u>proper handwashing technique</u>, and <u>tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits</u>
  - Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing the EOP:
    - 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 <u>guidance on developing high-quality school emergency operations plans</u>, and a <u>companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality school emergency operations plans</u>
    - The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's <u>website</u> contains free resources, trainings, and TA to schools and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks
- **Develop information-sharing systems with partners**
  - Information-sharing systems can be used for day-to-day reporting (on information such as changes in absenteeism) and disease surveillance efforts to detect and respond to an outbreak
  - Local health officials should be a key partner in information sharing
- **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 <u>that schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19</u>. Most respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19. If a community (or more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps
- 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 <u>families</u>

What preventive measures can be taken to help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses, like COVID-19?

Public Health recommends that schools increase education on respiratory hygiene. As with any other respiratory illnesses, there are steps that everyone can take daily to reduce the risk of getting sick or infecting others with circulating viruses

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - It is especially important to wash your hands:
    - Before, during, and after you prepare food
    - Before you eat and after you use the bathroom
    - After handling cash
    - More frequently when someone in your house is sick
    - Before/after smoking/vaping
    - Before/after using public computers
- Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Covering your coughs and sneezes with your arm
- Frequent cleaning of doorknobs, light switches, and other commonly touched areas with disinfectant wipes
- Avoiding contact with people who are ill
- Staying away from work, school or other people if you become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever and cough
- Facemasks are most effective when used appropriately by health care workers and people who are ill
- Get a flu shot – it's not too late to be protected against influenza

In addition, it is recommended that schools take these additional preventive measures:
- Staff and students who are ill should remain home
  - Persons who have been ill should be fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication before returning to school
- Separate students and staff who get sick at school from others until they can go home
- Provide adequate supplies for good hygiene, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer