Virginia Department of Health
Guidance for Educational Administrators on the COVID-19 Outbreak
Last Updated February 27, 2020

Current Situation

The Virginia Department of Health is closely monitoring an outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus (termed "COVID-19"). The vast majority of cases have occurred in China. However, community spread is being detected in a growing number of countries. Community spread means spread of an illness for which the source of infection is unknown. Destinations with widespread or sustained community spread of COVID-19 include China, Iran, Italy, Japan, and South Korea. Other destinations with instances of apparent community spread include Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

As of February 26, 2020, 15 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in the U.S. One of the 15 cases is in a person who reportedly did not have relevant travel history or exposure to another COVID-19 patient. It's possible this could be an instance of community spread of COVID-19, which would be the first time that has happened in the United States. It's also possible, however, that the patient may have been exposed to a returned traveler who was infected. Additionally, 45 cases of COVID-19 have been detected among the 1,100+ people repatriated from Hubei Province, China and the Diamond Princess back to the United States.

The current risk of COVID-19 infection to the American public is still considered low. As of today, there are no COVID-19 cases in Virginia.

The latest situation summary updates are available on [CDC's 2019 Novel Coronavirus Webpage.](#)

Virginia's local health departments are working closely with health care providers to identify patients who have clinical symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and have had possible exposure to the virus through travel or contact with a confirmed case. VDH has reported and is monitoring test results for [persons being tested](#). As of February 27, there have been eight people tested in Virginia. Six tested negative, and test results are still pending for two people. As of February 27, 2020, there are NO confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Virginia.

Virginia's Response

VDH has been taking proactive actions to prepare since the outbreak was first detected. We are having regular calls with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to learn as much as we can about the situation. We have provided guidance to healthcare providers in Virginia.

There is a [novel coronavirus webpage](#) with information about the outbreak and resources for healthcare providers. A call center is now available for general information about the novel coronavirus. The number is 877-ASK-VDH3.

Long-term Response

Due to the potential long-term threat of COVID-19, administrators should start reviewing outbreak response plans and procedures. CDC recently released COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers. It includes guidance on planning for a possible outbreak in the United States. CDC may release similar guidance for schools in the future. In the meantime, schools are advised to review the Virginia Department of Education's Pandemic Influenza Plan Guidelines for Virginia Public Schools. CDC also has guidance on nonpharmaceutical interventions, which includes planning guidance for schools. Although this guidance is geared towards pandemic flu outbreaks, it is also useful for planning for future respiratory disease outbreaks from other pathogens.

What to Do If Your School Has a Potential Case

If you are concerned about a student who has traveled to China and has symptoms of fever and cough or trouble breathing, contact your local health department.

Influenza (flu) and respiratory disease season is underway in Virginia. People should follow these tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses of any kind:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Wash your hands especially after coughing and sneezing, before and after caring for an ill person, and before preparing foods and before eating.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact (such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils) with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.
- Stay home when you are sick, except when you need to get medical care.

Thank you for your partnership as we continue to prepare and respond to this evolving public health threat. For patient-specific questions, we recommend you contact your healthcare provider. For general coronavirus questions, please visit the VDH coronavirus website listed above, or call your local health department or Department of Education.

Frequently Asked Questions

How does COVID-19 spread?

We are still learning about this novel coronavirus, but other human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes and through close personal contact (such as caring for or living with an infected person).

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

Symptoms can appear up to 14 days after exposure to the virus and typically include fever, cough and difficulty breathing.

Is there a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19?

A vaccine is not yet available to prevent COVID-19. There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 other than supportive care.

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

Doctors will work with public health to test patients for COVID-19 who meet CDC criteria for testing.

What if a student or staff member traveled to China and has no symptoms? Can they come to school?

Students or staff who arrived from China on or after February 4, 2020, should stay home from school until it's been 14 days since they left China. After the 14-day period, those students who are not sick are able to return to school with no restrictions on their activities.

What should schools do if a student left China after February 4, 2020 comes to school during their 14-day self-monitoring period?

If an administrator is aware that a student was asked to self-monitor and stay at home from school, that administrator may remind parents of the guidance and ask to keep the student home until 14 days following his or her return from China. Administrators and staff should be sensitive in their conversations with these families. Some families may not fully understand the instructions or severity of their actions. Administrators should reach out to their local health department or Department of Education, if further support is needed.

Can schools exclude students with recent travel from China but exhibit no symptoms?

No. Although these persons are asked to self-monitor and stay at home during the recommended 14 day observation period, these families are not legally obligated to stay at home. Administrators should reach out to their local health department or Department of Education, if further support is needed.

Will schools be notified if students travel to China?

No. Travelers' names and information will not be released to schools. It is at the family's discretion to inform the school if their student has traveled or needs to stay at home.

Should students who have been advised to stay home after returning from China be granted an excused absence?

Yes. Schools should make every effort to help these students maintain their schoolwork. Schools should have applicable teachers provide assignments and study material electronically and allow students to complete work from home.

What if a student has traveled to China and while in school becomes sick with fever and respiratory symptoms?

If a student who has traveled in the last 14 days to China develops fever or respiratory symptoms while at school, the local health department should be notified, and a parent/guardian should pick up the student immediately. The student should wear a surgical mask (if possible) and be placed in a safe isolation area visible to the school nurse or other school health services staff and separate from the rest of the health room. Ideally, this would be a private room with the door closed and clear visibility. A closet or room with no windows is not an appropriate location.

If you become of aware of a student who recently traveled to China and develops fever or respiratory illness, call your local health department and they can assist with determining what additional evaluation is needed. At this time of the year, there are many possible causes for respiratory illness. COVID-19 can only be confirmed with a medical visit and laboratory testing.

One of our students is an exchange student from China. Can they return home to China?

Yes. There are no restrictions for students from China to return home.

One of our schools has planned a sponsored trip to China, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, or Vietnam. Can they still go?

CDC currently recommends that travelers avoid non-essential travel to China and South Korea. CDC has travel advice for these other areas. The CDC's Travelers' Health webpage should be consulted for the most current advice for affected countries.

What if we think a student may be at risk for being infected with COVID-19?

If you have concerns that a student might have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19 either through travel or some other means, contact your local health department for further guidance.

If we have a student who has been ill at school and is now being tested for COVID-19, what do we tell the other parents and school staff?

Most people who have fever and respiratory symptoms, including people who were in China within the last 14 days, do not have COVID-19 but instead have other causes for their illness. If a student who has been at school is being tested for COVID-19, the local health department will work with schools on all the necessary next steps, including any related communications to parents or school staff. All such communications should be coordinated with the health department.

What can schools do at this time to decrease stigma and discrimination?

Stay informed, listen to public health messages, and implement good public health practices to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. Avoid stigmatizing people who have recently traveled from mainland China.

To reduce bullying, it's important for students, staff and parents to separate facts from fear. Guard against stigma by knowing the facts and only getting information from reliable sources. There are a lot of things on social media and in the news that are not rooted in science and are offensive, demeaning and racist. Encourage everyone to keep their attention on the facts. Contact your health district or the Department of Education if you have questions about exclusion of students or staff who have traveled or their family members, or if someone self-reports travel or illness.

How can I learn more about COVID-19?

If you have concerns that you may be sick from COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider.

Visit the Virginia Department of Health website: novel coronavirus webpage

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/index.html.