



COVID-19 Guidance

Public Health Guidance for Schools and Childcare Centers

The Ministry of Health and Social Development continues to monitor national, regional and international reports of COVID-19 disease. This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of the COVID-19 disease. The Environmental Health Division will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. This document is intended to be territory-wide guidance to help schools and early childhood centers with making informed decisions and to reduce opportunities for transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 in school and childcare settings.

Background:

COVID-19 is an emerging respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus that has spread worldwide. COVID-19 is primarily transmitted via respiratory droplets through coughing, sneezing and talking; and touching contaminated surfaces. The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 are very similar to that of other respiratory illness. They include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and shortness of breath; in severe cases it may cause pneumonia, severe respiratory syndrome, organ failure and even death. As the COVID-19 outbreaks evolves, the Environmental Health Division encourages schools and childcare centers to prepare for possible impact of COVID-19 and take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as other infectious diseases, including influenza and gastroenteritis. Creating an emergency plan can help protect you and the health of the individuals at your institution. This guidance, which is organized into four categories, provides recommended actions and strategies for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in school and childcare settings.

Recommendations:

When there is no community transmission: The most important thing to do at this point is to plan and prepare. Administrators should reinforce healthy practices among their staff and students. Schools need to be ready if COVID-19 appears in their community. Here are some strategies:

Review, update, and implement an emergency operation plan (EOP). This should be done in collaboration with local health officials. The plan should include preventative actions for staff



and students of how to reduce the spread of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19). This includes strategies for social distancing, emphasis on respiratory etiquette and handwashing and school dismissal. The plan should also include strategies for information-sharing between schools and local health officials, as well as strategies for continuing education in the event of school dismissal.

Teach and reinforce healthy hygiene practices. Train staff and cleaners on healthy hygiene practices so that they can teach students. Ensure handwashing practices include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating, after using the restroom, and after blowing nose, coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Apply sanitizer to palm of hand, rub vigorously for 20 seconds, and allow to air dry (Do Not Wipe). Additionally, maintain adequate supplies (e.g. soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, tissue) to support healthy hygiene practices.

Intensify cleaning and disinfecting efforts. Conduct training for staff and cleaners on how to effectively clean and disinfect. Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched (doorknobs, light switches, sink handles, countertops, desk, etc.). Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. A list of EPA-approved products for use against COVID-19 is available at <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus>.

The Environmental Health Division recommends the use of regular household bleach for disinfecting of surfaces. Preparing a bleach solution by mixing 1/3 cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water is effective for disinfection. Provide staff with disinfecting wipes to clean commonly touched surfaces (keyboards, controls, mouse, etc.) before use. Additionally, maintain adequate supplies to support cleaning and disinfecting practices.

Monitor and plan for absenteeism. Review attendance and sick leave policy. Encourage staff and student to stay at home when sick, even without documentation from doctors. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.

Consider postponing non-critical gathering and events. Give special consideration to events that might put staff, students and families in close proximity (assemblies, meetings, field trips, workshops, etc.)

Require sick staff and students to stay home. Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school. Establish procedures to ensure staff and students who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible. Identify an area where sick individuals can be isolated until they can leave the school.



When there is minimal to moderate community transmission: If local health officials report that there are multiple cases of COVID-19 in the community, schools may need to implement additional strategies in response to preventing the spread in school, but they should continue using the strategies implemented when there was no community transmission.

Coordinate with local health officials. Health officials can help a school determine which set of strategies might be most appropriate for their specific situation.

Implement multiple social distancing strategies. Administrators are encouraged to think creatively about all opportunities to increase physical space between students. Schools should consider modifying classes where students are likely to be in very close contact; increase the space between desk or cribs, avoid mixing students in common areas, and limiting nonessential visitors.

When there is substantial community transmission: Additional strategies, in addition to those implemented when there is no, minimal, or moderate transmission, must be considered when there is substantial transmission in the local community.

Continue to coordinate with local health officials.

Consider extended school dismissal. Implement extended school dismissal to slow transmission rate of COVID-19 in the community. Remember to implement strategies to ensure the continuity of education (e.g. distance learning) for students.

When a confirmed case has entered the school or childcare center: When a confirmed case has entered a school, regardless of community transmission, short-term closure procedures will need to be implemented. If this happens, the Environmental Health Division recommends the following procedures:

Coordinate with local health officials. Once you learn of a COVID-19 case in the school, immediately notify local health officials.

Dismiss students and most staff for 1 week. During this dismissal, intensify cleaning and disinfection of the surfaces around the school's campus.

Communicate with staff, parents and students. Keep staff, parents and students informed while maintaining confidentiality of the student or staff member.



Clean and disinfect thoroughly. Close off areas used by the individual(s) with COVID-19 and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Clean and disinfect all areas of the school, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

Make decision about extending the school dismissal. During school dismissal, schools and childcare centers may stay open for staff members while students stay at home.
Administrators

should seek guidance from local health officials to determine when staff and students should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community.

Implement strategies to continue education. Implement e-learning plans, including digital and distance learning options that are feasible and appropriate.