

February 28, 2020

To: School Principals and Superintendents

Current media is filled with coverage on coronavirus (COVID-19). The severity of illness or how many people will fall ill from COVID-19 is unknown at this time. The United States government is working closely with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, as well as public health partners, to respond to this public health threat. The public health response goal is to detect and minimize introductions of this disease in the United States to reduce the spread and the impact of COVID-19. In public health, **an epidemic** is an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in a community at a specific time; **outbreak** carries the same definition of epidemic, but is often used for a more limited geographic area; **pandemic** is a disease prevalent over a whole country or the world. COVID-19 infection is currently classified as an outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is monitoring this outbreak and believe that, in the United States, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.

While COVID-19 is not currently spreading in United States communities, school systems can be proactive and plan to respond in a flexible way to this public health threat. Schools and school districts can refine their business operation response plans. School administration, including health services leadership, must be actively involved in the planning process, which includes partnering with local public health authorities, updating infectious disease pandemic plans, and sharing essential communication strategies. School nurses are critical members of the planning team and must participate in the planning process. See CDC's interim guidance for school administrators in response to this outbreak. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>

### **Recommendations for Inclusion in the Emergency Response Plan**

CDC recommends the resource [\*Pandemic Flu Checklist for K-12 Administrators\*](#) (applicable to COVID-19) for school administrators. Consult with your **school nurse** regarding what is currently in the school's response plan and what recommendations they propose to include.

Should the United States experience a COVID-19 outbreak, CDC offers the following guidance

- Active encouragement of ill employees to stay home, including district vendors employees;
- Sick leave policies that are flexible and consistent with public health guidance
  - Allow care for family member
  - Forego healthcare provider note for employees who are sick with respiratory illness;
- Routine cleaning of high touch surfaces before students arrive and leave for the day; and
- Disinfection of commonly used surfaces with approved products. Consider in depth cleaning for disease outbreaks.

## Decisions that Need to be Made

In conjunction with the local and state health department authorities, consider the following when making decisions:

- Disease severity (i.e., number of people who are sick, hospitalization and death rates) in the community where schools are located.
- Impact of disease on employees and students that are vulnerable and may be at higher risk for COVID-19 adverse health complications.
- Increased absences. Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members, dismissals of early childhood programs and K-12 schools due to high levels of absenteeism or illness:
  - Determine when school closures are indicated based on a set percentage of staff and student absenteeism as recommended by local/state public health.
  - Clear communication for staff and families is critical for potential quarantine expectations related to school closures. Work with public health for effective communication strategies.
  - Establish virtual education options for students if available for school closures longer than 10 days.
  - Cross-train school personnel to perform essential functions so that the school can operate even if key staff members are absent.
- **Non-essential travel - consider canceling non-essential travel to countries per travel guidance on the CDC website, including local and national field trips.**
- Geographic location of schools. School systems with multiple locations spread out over a large geographical region are encouraged to take appropriate actions outlined in their infectious disease outbreak response plan, based on the condition in each locality with guidance from local/state public health authorities. Since the intensity of an outbreak may differ according to geographic location, local health officials will be issuing guidance specific to their communities.
- Communication to parents and staff is critical and requires coordination with state and local health departments to receive timely and accurate information to guide appropriate responses in each location where school operations reside.

School nurses stay updated on CDC announcements and state plans regarding COVID-19. School nurses are a critical resource for you – they will communicate updates to you to protect students and staff in school communities.