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Guidance for Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) March 6, 2020

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COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) virus, and we are learning more about it every day. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping spread of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy. More information on COVID-19 is available at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov.

If a significant COVID-19 exposure occurs on a school site, ACPHD will work closely with school and school district administration to evaluate risk and determine steps to protect students, staff, and families to prevent the spread of disease. Many miscommunications and rumors are circulating, so confirm any reported potential exposures to COVID19 with our health department before taking significant actions or distributing mass communications.

Childcare and K-12 school administrators can **take steps now** to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19:

- Understand how to help **prevent the transmission** of illness, including COVID-19, within childcare centers and schools.
- Understand what steps to take in order to **react quickly should a case be identified** in a school community.
- Take steps to **establish clear communication channels** with public health, students, staff, families, and school partners.
- Promote the **safety and wellbeing** of students, staff and families.
- **Plan for the continuity of teaching and learning** in the event that local health officials call for school dismissals.

CHECKLIST for School Administrators & Managers of Childcare Centers

- Read “Working with Alameda County Health Officials” (**page 3**) to understand when you should contact officials
- Share the recommended materials (**pages 4-5**) with your school community along with a customized message that indicates how you are preparing to respond
- Post and share the recommended educational materials (**page 5**) in your facilities, on your website and other communication channels
- Incorporate daily reminders to staff, students and families on behaviors they can adopt now to prevent spread of illness (**page 5**)
- Review your custodial protocols and update if needed in accordance with guidance (**page 5**)
- Review emergency safety plans, modify as needed and share with staff (**page 6**)
- Understand how to respond if you suspect a case of COVID-19 in your school community (**page 6**)
- Prepare for and track student and staff absenteeism (**pages 6-7**)
- Prepare to respond to stigma and discrimination in your school community (**page 7**)
- Prepare for potential school dismissal if directed by local health officials (**pages 7-8**)

Working with Alameda County Health Officials

Alameda County health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 into communities. **Schools and childcare centers are an important partner** in this effort.

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 want to **be ready** if COVID-19 does appear in their facilities.

When to contact local health officials:

- There is a suspected or confirmed case or cases at your school or childcare center.
 - Schools should work with the Alameda County Public Health Department and other relevant leadership to communicate the possible COVID-19 exposure.
 - It is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student or staff member as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.
- There is a high amount of absenteeism due to illness (not absenteeism that is due to families taking precautions).
- To contact Alameda County's School Liaison, please contact Lisa.Erickson@acgov.org

When you do not need to contact local health officials:

- You do not need to share your emergency health plans with local health officials for review.
- You do not need to report students or families who have recently traveled to one of the countries with a confirmed outbreak, unless they are exhibiting respiratory illness symptoms or they are known to have come into contact with a case of COVID-19.
- Right now, school officials and members of the general public should not contact local health officials for COVID-19 testing; only medical providers can initiate testing for COVID-19.

Stay Informed Using Trusted Resources

Refer to reliable resources produced by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD).

Pay close attention to the source of facts and information, especially those shared on social media, as these sources are sometimes not based on science and may be culturally offensive.

The following is a list of **recommended, reliable sources** to stay informed:

- General CDC fact sheets to help staff and students' families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
 - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

- [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)ⁱⁱ](#)
- [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19ⁱⁱⁱ](#)
- CDC Information on [COVID-19 and children^{iv}](#)
- CDC information for staff, students, and their families who have recently traveled back to the United States from areas where CDC has identified community spread of coronavirus:
 - A list of countries where community spread of COVID-19 is occurring can be found on the CDC webpage: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel^v](#)
- For updated information from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) on COVID-19, [click here^{vi}](#)
- For up to date information from the Alameda County Department of Public Health (ACDPH) [click here^{vii}](#)

Keep Students & Families Informed

Create a communications plan for use with the school community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and their families.
- Include information about steps being taken by the school or childcare facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.
- Share resources with the school community to help families understand how to prevent spread and when to keep children home.

Any communication to students and families should **include information that helps them make safe, informed decisions and educates them on how to remain healthy.**

- Students and families should avoid close contact with those who are sick
- Encourage families to talk to students about simple, but effective prevention tips, such as covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve (not hands) and washing hands frequently
- Follow established health protocols for any staff/student presenting sick with respiratory symptoms
 - Ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are separated from others, and sent home as soon as possible
 - Staff/students with a fever should be fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications before returning to school
- Staff and families presenting symptoms should seek immediate medical care if symptoms become more severe, e.g., high fever or difficulty breathing.
- Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure: Fever, Cough, and Shortness of breath.

Distribute the following fact sheets and resources with students (where age-appropriate), their families, and staff:

- General CDC fact sheets to help staff and students' families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
 - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)^{viii}
 - [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)^{ix}
 - [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19](#)^x

For questions about students who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC's [FAQ for travelers](#).^{xi}

- Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19.
- Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials – refer to the CDC website on travel guidelines.

Implement Protective Measures Now

Remind students and staff to **cover their mouths and nose with a tissue or sleeve** (not hands) when coughing or sneezing.

Strongly **promote the flu** vaccine for all students and staff – it's not too late to get the flu vaccine.

- While the flu vaccine does not prevent COVID-19, it can prevent the flu. If there is a coronavirus outbreak, hospitals and healthcare facilities will need all the beds, staff, and equipment they can muster

Reinforce proper handwashing strategies with staff, students and families.

- Wash hands 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.
- Increase hand hygiene stations
- CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](#)^{xii}, information on [proper handwashing technique](#)^{xiii}, and [tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits](#)^{xiv}.

Perform **routine environmental** cleaning.

- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, desks) with the cleaners typically used.
- 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.

Review Existing Emergency Plans

Review, update, and implement school safety plans and **emergency operations plans**.

- 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.
- Schools should consider plans for social services and other critical, non-academic services provided at schools, such as meal services, health and mental health services, family and parent services.
- Ensure the plan emphasizes common-sense preventive actions for students and staff.
- Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing the EOP:
 - [Click for guidance on developing high-quality school emergency operations plans](#)^{xv}
 - [Click for companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality](#)^{xvi} [school emergency operations plans](#)
 - Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#)^{xvii}
 - American Academy of Pediatrics provides information on [germ prevention strategies](#)^{xviii} and [reducing the spread of illness in childcare settings](#).^{xix}
 - CDC has workplace resources such as posters with messages for staff about [staying home when sick](#)^{xx} and how to [avoid spreading germs at work icon](#).^{xxi}

Be Prepared to Respond

Establish **procedures for students and staff who are sick** at school.

- Ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are separated from others, and 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) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.

Implement Plans for Staff and Student Absenteeism

Track attendance patterns, and report as appropriate.

- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your school among both students and staff.
- Alert Alameda County health officials about large increases in student and staff absenteeism, if absences appear due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the “flu,” which have symptoms similar to symptoms of COVID-19) by calling Alameda

County's Department of Public Health dedicated line for disease reporting: (510) 267-3250 between the hours of 8:30AM – 5:00PM.

Allow for **flexibility on absenteeism** policies.

- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Direct students and staff to stay home when sick.
- Allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
- Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives during this time.

Plan for absenteeism

- 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.

Be Prepared to Handle Stigma and Discrimination

Staff should **be on alert for any signs of stigma, discrimination or bullying** against students or families who have recently traveled from mainland China or other impacted countries or areas.

Encourage everyone to **keep their attention on the facts**. 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.

Provide staff, students and families with resources and numbers to **report concerns regarding school-based harassment, intimidation, discrimination, and/or bullying behavior**.

Prepare for School Dismissals

Schools are **not expected to make decisions about dismissal** on their own.

- Local health officials can work with schools to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps.
- School dismissal decisions must balance the potential benefits of protecting the school community and slowing the spread of disease with the potential societal disruption and impact
- School dismissals of different durations may achieve two different objectives:
 - Protection of students and staff members – short term
 - Conducting an investigation, ensuring ill people are not continuing to spread disease in the school environment, conducting cleaning
 - Dismissal may only be a few days
 - Reducing or delaying the spread of infection and illness within the wider community – longer term
 - High economic impact
 - Most evidence for impact with high disease severity

- Strict community social distancing is maintained (i.e. no gathering of students outside of the classroom environment)
- Dismissal of weeks to months

Begin planning for ways to conduct off-site learning in the event that Alameda County health officials call for school dismissal. School dismissals may require staff and teachers to continue working while students are asked to stay home.

- Review options for assigned homework, internet-based instruction, closed-circuit television, etc.
- Consider ways to conduct distance learning or childcare in smaller groups (6 or less)
- Plan for ways to continue to provide social services, medical or therapeutic services, or meals for students dependent on school for these services

Main Sources:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>
- <http://www.acphd.org/media/556045/2019-ncov-guidance-school-districtsk-k-12-20200207.pdf>
- <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/novel-coronavirus-guidance-schools.pdf>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/29/health/coronavirus-flu.html>

URLs for materials referenced:

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- ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>
 - ⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>
 - ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf>
 - ^{iv} <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>
 - ^v <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>
 - ^{vi} <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx>
 - ^{vii} <http://www.acphd.org/2019-ncov>
 - ^{viii} <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>
 - ^{ix} <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>
 - ^x <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf>
 - ^{xi} <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/faqs.html>
 - ^{xii} <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html>
 - ^{xiii} <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
 - ^{xiv} <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/handwashing-family.html>
 - ^{xv} https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf
 - ^{xvi} https://rems.ed.gov/docs/District_Guide_508C.pdf
 - ^{xvii} <https://rems.ed.gov/>
 - ^{xviii} <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Germ-Prevention-Strategies.aspx>
 - ^{xix} <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Prevention-In-Child-Care-or-School.aspx>
 - ^{xx} <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/pdf/stay-home-youre-sick-employers-item4.pdf>
 - ^{xxi} <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/pdf/dont-spread-germs-work-item3.pdf>