OKLAHOMA
State Department of Health

COVID-19 K-12 Schools Guidance

BACKGROUND

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) has developed this resource to provide information about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and to guide kindergarten through 12th grade school administrators to prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks in the United States.

OSDH recognizes K-12 staff and students in Oklahoma are concerned about the current outbreak of novel coronavirus. Public health officials are working with other state departments of health and the CDC to learn as much as possible about COVID-19 so that we can better understand how it spreads and better characterize its associated illness. The OSDH is also working to develop guidance and education materials in the face of evolving information. The OSDH will update this guidance for K-12 schools as the COVID-19 situation evolves requiring modification to recommendations.

WHAT IS NOVEL CORONAVIRUS?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Many of them infect animals, but some coronaviruses from animals can evolve (change) into a new human coronavirus that can spread from person-to-person. This is what happened with the current novel coronavirus known as COVID-19. Coronavirus disease in people typically causes mild to moderate illness, like the common cold. Some, like the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) coronavirus or the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronavirus, can cause serious symptoms of illness like pneumonia.

WHAT ARE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

Information to date suggests this virus is causing symptoms consistent with a respiratory illness such as cough, fever, and shortness of breath. If a person has traveled from a country experiencing sustained community transmission of COVID-19 and develops any of these symptoms within 14 days of their return, they should seek medical care right away. Please call the healthcare provider and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.

HOW IS NOVEL CORONAVIRUS SPREAD?

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

- Droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes

- 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

Novel coronavirus is new, and we are learning more each day about how it spreads and how long it takes for people to become sick, which is 2-14 days based on the latest research. As information becomes available, we will keep you informed.

How is COVID-19 treated?

There is no specific treatment for illness caused by the novel coronavirus. Medical management is based on the patient's condition. Complications or secondary infections caused by the novel coronavirus may require extensive medical treatment but the majority of cases will not require hospitalization or additional medical follow-up. There is currently no vaccine to prevent novel coronavirus.

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

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

- Stay home when you are sick.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Help young children do the same.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Limit close contact, like kissing and sharing cups or utensils, with people who are sick.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, use your sleeve (not your hands).

Planning and Preparedness Recommendations for K-12 schools:

- Stay informed about COVID-19 through the OSDH and CDC websites (links listed below) and your local county health department.

- Collaborate with your boards of education to review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs), particularly for infectious disease outbreaks. The U.S. Department of

Education has outlined this six-step process:
https://rems.ed.gov/K12GuideForDevelHQSchool.aspxexternal%20icon?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1
for creating EOPs for K-12 schools.

- ☐ 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.

- ☐ 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.

- The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's website https://rems.ed.gov/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1 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 flexible attendance and sick leave policies that encourage students and staff to stay home when sick or caring for sick family members.

- Alert your local health department about large increases in student and staff absenteeism due to respiratory illnesses.

- Establish procedures for separating sick students and staff from those who are well and for sending sick students and staff home as soon as possible.

- 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.

- Create communications plans 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.

How will administration be informed if there is a case affiliated with a K-12 school?

Public health officials will notify the Superintendent/Principal immediately upon confirmation of novel coronavirus. Public health staff will work with school officials to identify who was in contact with the case and to begin the process to track and monitor contacts. The OSDH Office of Communications will also coordinate with school public information staff to develop messaging for mass communications.

Response recommendations in the event of confirmed novel coronavirus transmission among persons affiliated with your school:

- 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.

- Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events, including sporting events.

- Discourage students and staff from gathering or socializing outside school.

- mplement e-learning plans and distance learning options. The U.S. Department of Education offers recommendations for a Digital Learning/Education Technology Plan.

- Determine, in consultation with school district officials or other relevant state or local partners:

  - If a waiver is needed for state requirements of a minimum number of in-person instructional hours or school days (seat time) as a condition for funding;

  - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train teachers to do so;

  - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff;

  - How to encourage appropriate adult supervision while children are using distance learning approaches; and

  - How to deal with the potential lack of students' access to computers and the Internet at home.

- Work with state and local health officials to ensure continuity of supplemental feeding programs for school children; distribute through non-congregate settings. See the United States Department of Agriculture Meal Service During Unanticipated School Closures.

  - If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as "grab-and-go" bagged lunches or meal delivery.

- Continue providing necessary services for children with special health care needs.

- Share resources with the school community to help families understand when to keep children home.

- Perform routine environmental cleaning.

  - Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, countertops) with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.

  - 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.

For more information:

- Oklahoma State Department of Health novel coronavirus website:
  https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Interim Guidance for Schools:
  https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html

- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools:
  https://rems.ed.gov/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

- USDA Meal Service During Unanticipated School Closures:
  https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/meal-service-during-unanticipated-school-closures

- US Department of Education National Education Technology Plan:
  https://tech.ed.gov/netp/