

COVID-19 Response Guide

A Few Notes...

- This is the novel coronavirus. Remember to include the word novel in all of your communications.
- Date (and possibly time) stamp every communication you disseminate. This is a rapidly-evolving situation, and you will want your communications to reflect the time of information release.
- If you haven't already, start drafting a communication NOW. Our local, state, and national health expert partners would like us to communicate information on what is currently known, as well as share ways to prevent the introduction/spread of COVID-19 (think: handwashing, sneezing, and coughing etiquette).

Determine Who to Communicate With + With What Channels

- Employees must be informed first. They may receive inquiries and providing them with a script/guidance will help in ensuring consistent information is shared and to dispel rumors.
 - Stakeholder groups may include district/school administration; frontline employees; district/school employees; families; community members; School Board; news media.
- Additionally: Leverage all appropriate communication channels. The more ways we convey and repeat our message, the more opportunities we have to share accurate information.
 - Possible channels include face-to-face; phone call; email; SMS/text message; website (page and/or on-screen alert); social media; mobile app (item and/or push notification).

Four Fs of Crisis Communications

1. Fast - be as fast as you can, but slow as you must.
2. Frequent - post small updates that are easy to consume and keep the public well informed.
3. Factual - **no** assumptions. Only post facts and back up those facts with local partner resources.
4. Flexible - the only thing for certain is that the situation will change. Adapt your messaging to the situation. Foresee potential stumbling blocks and address with FAQ-type updates.

Talking Points / Holding Statements

Holding statements are used to acknowledge an incident, give facts, alleviate concerns, and provide time to gather more information. In a holding statement, state what you know versus what you don't, and provide anticipatory guidance. You ALERT, INFORM, REASSURE (think: you provide AIR).

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- **Alert: provide an initial statement (who/what/when/where/NOT why).**
 - The flu season has been complicated by a cluster of respiratory illnesses caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).
 - (SCHOOL SYSTEM) is aware of an outbreak of COVID-19, commonly referred to as the novel coronavirus, and has been monitoring developments in the spread of the disease.
 - Coronavirus is a type of virus common around the world. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is new.
 - Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath. These viruses spread through coughing or sneezing, similar to influenza.
 - Much of the current knowledge is based on what is known about similar coronaviruses, which includes SARS and MERS.
 - The situation is evolving.
 - We are still learning about this newly-emerged virus.
 - Recent news stories have increased awareness of the novel coronavirus.
 - Recent information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has raised questions.
 - This may be a source of concern for some of our community members.
 - Information/Recommendations are being updated as additional information becomes available.
 - (X) number of novel coronavirus cases have been found in our (REGION/STATE) as of (DATE).
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believe that symptoms appear anywhere from two to 14 days after exposure, which is why many recommendations include a 14-day incubation period to monitor individuals for possible exposure.
 - While there are no reports of COVID-19 in our (REGION/STATE), we are preparing for the possibility that the virus could make its way to our area.
 - The purpose of this communication is to share facts and information with you from reputable sources.
 - We would like to share with you the information and guidance we have received from (SOURCES).
 - We would like to remain families to also be vigilant about the prevalence of Influenza A and Influenza B as well.

- **Inform: provide priorities and actions.**

- We have many protocols in place due to the cold and flu season, which we will continue to implement and can increase if needed.
- There are many questions, but at this time we can provide some basic information.
- We want to provide you with some basic, but important, facts regarding the novel coronavirus:
 - It was first identified in the city of Wuhan in Hubei Province in China.
 - There are (x) confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in (REGION/STATE) as of (DATE).
 - The virus does not survive well for long periods of time outside of the body.
 - It is unlikely to be spread through food.
- There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.
- Symptoms may include cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, headache, body or muscle aches, fatigue/tiredness, fever.
- Medical experts indicate the best ways to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus are the same recommendations for preventing the spread of influenza, which include (LIST).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer the following proper precautions to keep you and your families healthy:
 - Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before leaving home, on arrival at school/work, after using the restroom, before food preparation, before eating any food (including snacks), and when arriving back at home.
 - For young children, suggest they hum the “Happy Birthday” song twice from beginning to end twice while washing their hands. This video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZw4Ga3jg3E>) from the CDC is a great resource to show young children.
 - If soap is unavailable, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Rub the sanitizer over all the surfaces of your hands, which also takes approximately 20 seconds.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Cover your cough/sneeze with a tissue, throw the tissue in the garbage, and wash your hands. If a tissue is unavailable, cough/sneeze into your flexed elbow.
 - Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
 - Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick.

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- Stay home if you are sick. Do not send your student to school if they are feeling sick. See (RESOURCE) for more information.
 - Influenza vaccinations are still available, which you can obtain through your student's health care provider or at (LOCATION).
 - Stay up-to-date on other routine childhood and adult immunizations.
- As news continues to emerge regarding the novel coronavirus, we want to remind students, families, and employees that washing your hands, covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing, and remaining at home when sick or feverish are the best ways to prevent the spread of flu or other respiratory illnesses.
 - School systems across the nation have been advised by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ["plan and prepare."](#) The system is coordinating efforts with local authorities, including (LIST), to ensure a continuity of efforts.
 - School nurses and custodians play a vital role in keeping schools safe and healthy learning environments. Nurses are available to monitor student health on campus.
 - Our facilities department is committed to both regular cleaning and increased disinfection of all high-touch surfaces, including school buses.
 - It is important to remind families that students who are showing symptoms of fever or other illness should not come to school while sick.
 - Families are encouraged to provide updated contact information through your child's school office.
 - We are reminding and supporting teachers to encourage good hygiene practices and stress the importance of this to students. Good handwashing and cough/sneeze etiquette remain two of the most effective ways to stop spreading communicable illnesses.
 - The U.S. Surgeon General has said face masks are not recommended to protect from the virus, as there is no evidence about the benefit of use outside healthcare environments.
 - Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of a virus to help prevent the spread of the disease to others, or by healthcare workers who are taking care of someone with symptoms.
 - There are three non-pharmaceutical interventions:
 - Personal interventions, which include the precautions shared above.
 - Community interventions, which include reducing face-to-face contact with those who are sick.

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- Check with your health insurance provider to see if virtual care (online or e-visits) is available.
 - Note: if you believe you may have the novel coronavirus, contact your healthcare provider in advance of your visit and inform them of your recent travels and respiratory symptoms.
 - Environmental interventions, which include consistently cleaning surfaces that are frequently touched.
 - At this time, there is no need to cancel school or social events.
 - Schools will ask a student to self-quarantine if the local health department informs a school that a student must comply with a quarantine order or the student is symptomatic of a communicable or infectious disease.
 - For those families that will be traveling for an upcoming vacation, CDC guidance on returning travelers is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>
 - Note: The US State Department warned that travelers should prepare for restrictions with little or no notice.
 - Students should not be excluded from school or any activities based on race, country of origin, or recent travel.
 - It is important to avoid prejudice against anyone of Asian descent. Under civil rights law obligations, we prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of disability, race, and national origin.
 - There have been reports in other communities/states of students and others being stigmatized.
 - We urge everyone to help prevent discrimination. We must all take care to avoid stereotypical assumptions and discriminatory actions when handling COVID-19-related issues.
- **Reassure.**
 - We are working with (LIST ENTITIES) for regular updates.
 - We are tracking cases through proven and trustworthy sources which include (LIST ENTITIES).
 - We have proactively shared information with (STAKEHOLDERS) on (DATE(S)).
 - A team of administrators including (POSITION TITLES) is meeting (FREQUENCY) to share information from (SOURCES) and plan responses.
 - We have posted information on our (WEBSITE/APP/SOCIAL MEDIA) at (ADDRESS), which we will update as needed.

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- Very few cases of the novel coronavirus have been reported in children. It is more common for those with a weakened immune system, who have long-term health conditions, or are older in age. If you have a child with a pre-existing illness, you should discuss any increased risk with your primary care provider.
 - We have taken the following precautions to prevent the spread of any illness or virus that contributes to illness, which include using hospital-grade products. These precautions include: (LIST).
 - While the system is being proactive in its approach, these messages are not intended to cause alarm, but to keep students and staff healthy and safe.
 - Prevention remains our priority.
 - We are not taking these precautions out of fear, but are doing so to minimize the spread of any illness, including influenza.
 - Our school system is prepared. We are reviewing our pandemic plan internally in collaboration with (AGENCIES). We will follow our local and state agencies lead on sharing any health measures to come.
 - Simple and effective habits include frequent hand washing, and covering every cough and sneeze.
 - In sending this communication, our intention is to provide factual information about COVID-19 and tips on reducing the spread of disease, as well as the spread of misinformation.
 - For more information, please visit the websites for the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) or (INSERT INFO).
 - Please be reassured that we are closely monitoring.
 - If cases are identified in our community, we will work closely with medical experts to determine the next steps.
 - In the event it becomes necessary, the school system will use all of its communication platforms, including (LIST), to let you know about any additional steps we are taking.
 - We work every day to keep your students and our employees healthy from all viruses that contribute to illness and appreciate your continued support in doing the same. We will share updates when new information or guidelines need to be communicated.
 - We have a shared responsibility in protecting our students, employees, visitors, and community from the spread of the novel coronavirus.
 - We take the honor and responsibility of educating your students very seriously.
 - Thank you for your continued support in keeping students and employees safe.

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- It takes all of us working together to ensure healthy learning environments.
 - If you have any additional questions about the novel coronavirus, please visit (RESOURCE).
 - For anyone who is feeling anxious or distressed, please visit (RESOURCE).
 - For Families: [Talking to Children About COVID-19](#) (NASP); [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) (NCTSN)
 - For Families and Educators: [Take Advantage of Teachable Moments](#) (School District of Clayton)
 - For Admin/Crisis Response Teams: [Preparing for a Pandemic Illness](#) (NASP); [Responding to COVID-19](#) (NASP)
 - For Mental Health Professionals: [Preparing for Infectious Disease Epidemics](#) (NASP); [Mental Health and Behavioral Guidelines for Preparedness and Response to Coronavirus and other Emerging Infectious Outbreaks](#) (CSTS)

Additional Resources

- [COVID-19 Plan from Klein ISD](#) (includes questions to consider, resources, and scripts) - thanks, Justin Elbert!
 - Note: if you have a confirmed case of novel coronavirus, these resources are ready-to-go.
- [Pandemic Flu Checklist: K-12 School Administrators](#) (AASA)

To Do List

- **As soon as possible**
 - Review/Create a pandemic plan for your school system.
 - Create a list of actions you are taking.
 - Ex: Increasing sanitization; stockpiling of cleaning items.
 - Determine if you need to screen new student enrollments for recent travel history.
 - Review School Board policies.
 - Keep in mind the question: can you release information if you have someone in self-quarantine/being tested/has tested positive for novel coronavirus?
 - Determine who is the spokesperson for your school system.
 - Start drafting materials to help prepare for possible upcoming interviews, news conferences, etc.

- **In the coming days/week**

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- Prepare telehealth information for local health providers for employees and families.
 - Create/Communicate a system to monitor for influenza-like absences from school (for both students and employees).
 - Gather/Share resources with employees and families, as needed.

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