

GUIDANCE TO ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS REGARDING COVID-19

The spread of the virus associated with COVID-19 has reached an inflection point at the global, national, and state levels, and the number of confirmed and presumptive positive COVID-19 cases and their close contacts in the Commonwealth continue to grow. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker has declared a state of emergency to be able to give the Administration more flexibility to respond to this outbreak.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) and local health departments are increasingly called upon to make recommendations to local school districts and individual schools about how best to respond to known and suspected exposures and for information about more generalized risk of transmission in the community.

While to date, young children and adolescents appear to be less seriously affected by the virus (whether resistant to initial infection or less likely to develop severe symptoms) school settings represent contexts of close physical contact among young people, with adult school staff, and families served by schools.

With this in mind, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and DPH are instructing schools to take the following steps:

1. Effective immediately, all schools must cancel or reschedule large events or gatherings (including assemblies) of 250 people or more for the foreseeable future. Schools are strongly urged to postpone or cancel other events if students, staff, and others cannot maintain recommended social-distancing practices by staying 6 feet apart from one another. Schools should consider postponing or canceling sporting events, but if such events are held, attendance should be limited to the participants and their families. This recommendation includes any organized youth athletic programs, club sports, intramural activities, and competitions, whether or not they are affiliated with or sponsored by a school or school district.
2. All schools must implement policies on expanded environmental cleaning, whether or not there has been a known case of COVID-19 in the school. Schools must clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily using an [EPA-registered disinfectant](#).

Additional guidance for example situations school districts may encounter is provided below.

Scenario 1: A student's household member has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or a staff household member has been diagnosed with COVID-19

Guidance:

1. The student or staff member with a family member who tested positive for COVID-19 will be required to quarantine at home. In general, people in quarantine who have not developed symptoms are not considered high risk for transmission of the virus. The student or staff member may return to school once the 14-day quarantine period has ended, as advised by the local board of health.

2. School leadership should work with DPH or the local health board to discuss the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school and consider a school closure for purposes of comprehensive cleaning.
3. If a decision is made that the school should be closed for cleaning, the school should be closed for **no more than 2 days**.
 - When a school suspects an individual with COVID-19 has visited the school. The school should be cleaned. CDC guidance recommends waiting up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfecting. Schools should follow the [CDC guidance](#) for cleaning and disinfection.
4. Other students or staff 1) who have not been in close contact with a positive case, and 2) who show no signs or symptoms of illness may continue to attend school. Close contact includes:
 - Living in the same household as a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Caring for a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 15 minutes, **or**
 - Being in direct contact with secretions from a sick person with COVID-19 (e.g., being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).

Scenario 2: A student or staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19

Guidance:

1. The student or staff member who tested positive for COVID-19 will be required to isolate at home. The student or staff member may not return to school until they are authorized to leave their home by the local board of health.
2. Anyone who has had close contact (defined as physical contact or sharing of airspace within six feet for more than 15 minutes) with a positive case should be immediately identified and should consult with DPH and/or the local health department. DPH or the local health department will, where appropriate, require quarantining at home according. Close contact includes:
 - Living in the same household as a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Caring for a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 15 minutes, **or**
 - Being in direct contact with secretions from a sick person with COVID-19 (e.g., being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).Quarantined individuals that have questions or concerns related to their quarantine should contact DPH or their local health department.
3. School leadership should work with DPH or the local health board to discuss the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school. If the student has been at school in close contact with other students immediately prior to the diagnosis school leadership should **close the school for at least 14 days**. Decisions about school closure should be made on a school-by-school basis **not at the school district level**. Additional guidance is available from the [CDC](#).
4. School leadership should work with the local health board during the quarantine period to monitor additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the district and should discuss protocols for reopening the school.

Scenario 3: A student or staff member has returned from international travel.

Guidance:

1. All returning travelers from high risk [Level 3 countries](#) must self-quarantine for 14 days.
2. This precludes post-travel presence in a school setting during the time of quarantine.
3. If a student or staff member recently returned from traveling to a Level 3 country, but has come to school, school's should follow procedures described above in Scenario 1.

Scenario 4: There is sustained community transmission in my local community, possibly including members of the school community

1. Currently there are no communities in the Commonwealth that meet this criteria.
2. If sustained community transmission develops in a community within the Commonwealth, school leadership should work with DPH or the local health board to discuss the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school.
3. School leadership should consider closing or dismissing the school or group of schools, which may include the entire school district **for at least 14 days**. The goal of this action is to increase social distancing for both students and staff and to encourage parents/guardians to practice social distancing from work and other group settings.
4. School leadership should work with DPH and their local health departments to make a determination about when to reopen the school.