

Social Distancing for Schools for Pandemic Illness (COVID-19)

Introduction

Schools, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases. Schools serve students, staff, and visitors from throughout the community many of whom have close contact in the school setting, often sharing spaces, equipment, and supplies.

Social distancing is a practice that is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help prevent the spread of illnesses such as COVID-19 among the students and staff. School leaders and decision-makers can use the following information in preparation for pandemic illness.

Goals for Social Distancing

- Slow the pace of the outbreak/pandemic within the community
- Decrease the mixing of students within grades, within schools, and between schools
- Reduce the risk of transmission to those most vulnerable to complications

Pre-Local Transmission (locally acquired cases in state or nation, but not in our town)

- Administration recommendations:
 - Connect with your local board of education and school superintendents to review your pandemic response plans and capabilities for supporting online or home-based education.
 - Plan for options to continue student services (such as meals and social services), if schools close.
- Facility or custodial recommendations:
 - Increase ventilation in classrooms and activity areas to the extent possible. Bringing in 15-20 cfm/person outside air and using MERV 13 filters will help with air quality and MAY help with reducing respiratory disease transmission.
 - In anticipation of shortages of supplies associated with an outbreak response, start building a bulge in your just-in-time ordering processes that will allow your school to adjust to increased utilization of supplies or delays in order fulfillment from your usual vendors.
 - Consider researching or adding additional vendors for critical cleaning or infection prevention supplies (masks, etc.) in anticipation of possible shortages.
 - Provide custodial staff with appropriate personal protective equipment for use while cleaning.
- Normalize respiratory etiquette and handwashing:
 - Provide education on these topics directly to families by email, social media, or material sent home with students.
 - Provide presentations on respiratory etiquette directly to students in classes or through video streaming.
 - Call attention to the risks of sharing drinks, water bottles, or e-cigarettes.
 - Consider use of hand sanitizer in areas or circumstances where handwashing is not available, e.g., field trips. Hand sanitizers should be dye free, fragrance free, alcohol-

based, and contain a minimum of 60% alcohol. **Hand sanitizers are not a substitute for proper handwashing.**

- Provide tissues so that they are available in all classrooms.
- Encourage staff to notice good respiratory etiquette with students and other staff. What gets noticed gets repeated.
- Emphasize hand washing after using the bathroom, before eating, and after using the playground and PE/weight room equipment.
- Conduct pre-event planning to meet increased demand of distance learning options for ill students as well as healthy students who may choose to stay home for fear of exposure.
- School nursing recommendations:
 - Send students home with fever >100.4 degrees, cough or shortness of breath.
 - ***NEW*** Discontinuing home isolation:
 - For students or staff who have tested positive for COVID-19: They should remain under home isolation precautions for 7 days OR until 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better (whichever is longer).
 - If students or staff have fever with cough or shortness of breath, but have not been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and have not tested positive for COVID-19: They should stay home, away from others, until 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better.
 - Consider fit testing of school nurses and train them on the use of N-95 masks. If staff are not fit tested or N-95 masks are not available, then a surgical or procedure mask would be the recommended alternative for health room staff.
 - N-95 masks are for health room staff only who are evaluating children with respiratory illness.
 - Utilize surgical masks only for staff or students with respiratory illness. We do not recommend masking for healthy students or staff.
 - Consider health rooms having non-oral thermometers to allow evaluation of students who are wearing masks.
 - Set up process where you can track student illness related absenteeism for all schools that is specific for fever or respiratory illness. Continue tracking of all-cause student absenteeism rates.
 - Consider setting up a process to track staff respiratory illness.
 - Consider setting up a process to communicate enhanced cleaning requirements to custodial staff when absenteeism rates reach predefined thresholds.

Tier 1 (disease has entered Spokane County with locally acquired cases)

- Facility or custodial recommendations:
 - Recommend general enhanced cleaning of hard surfaces daily (desks, tables, countertops, sinks). Enhanced cleaning should include cleaning/disinfection of frequently touched surfaces (door handles, faucets, railings), restrooms and health rooms at least once per day. Fitness equipment should be cleaned/sanitized between users.
 - Schools should follow standard procedures for cleaning with third party certified “green” cleaners and disinfecting with an EPA registered disinfectant with a claim for human coronaviruses.

- Alcohol wipes can be used to clean computer keyboards. Frequency of cleaning should ideally occur after every class or daily, if that is not possible.
- Conduct passive surveillance of staff/volunteers/student teachers for symptoms of fever >100.4 degrees, cough, or shortness of breath. Ask staff/volunteers/student teachers to stay home from work with any of these symptoms and to notify their supervisor of their illness.
- Recommendations to decrease student mixing:
 - Consider staggered schedules between grades which would lead to decreased crowding in hallways and less mixing during mealtimes in the school cafeteria.
 - Consider the use of bagged lunches to allow for meals to be eaten in students' classrooms rather than allowing additional mixing in the cafeteria.
 - Consider prioritizing PE classes to outdoor activities as much as possible.
 - Consider spacing classroom desks farther apart to the extent possible for the number of students attending class.
 - Consider seating arrangements so that students are not facing each other directly.
- Plan for prolonged increased absenteeism of ill or healthy students from the perspective of distance learning support.
- School nursing recommendations:
 - Notify parents/guardians of children with chronic medical conditions/immunosuppression of the theoretically increased risks associated with coronavirus infections with people who have these conditions. Notification would include:
 - Possible increased risk of complications related to COVID-19 for people with chronic medical conditions.
 - Educational options available for parents/guardians who choose to remove their child from school.
 - All students with fever or respiratory symptoms should be given a surgical mask to wear when they come to the sick room.

Tier 2 (first outbreaks reported Spokane County)

- Recommendations to decrease student mixing:
 - Consider closing the cafeteria to breakfast or lunch seating and only provide bagged meals that can be eaten outdoors or in student's classrooms.
 - Minimize large indoor gatherings/meetings of students. If large meetings or assemblies are utilized, then consider:
 - Having classes sit together to decrease mixing, and
 - Spacing 4-6 feet between students and using alternating rows with bleachers, and
 - Moving the gathering outside, allowing the classes to spread out more.
 - Consider canceling use of playground or outdoor PE activities, if mixing beyond classrooms is likely to occur.
 - Consider postponing or cancelling non-essential planned activities or events that involve significant mixing between grade levels or schools (such as inter-school sporting events).
- Determine alternatives to school busing. This is a generally a closed environment with crowding and poor air circulation.

- Consider advising parents to drop off children by car, if possible. While many parents would not be able to do so, any increased utilization of parent drivers would decrease crowding on buses.
- Consider having bus windows open as much as possible to allow increased ventilation/dilution.
- Consider every-other-row seating and staggered from either side of the aisle.
- Consider cleaning and disinfection of buses and airing out between routes.

Tier 3 (widespread outbreaks in Spokane County)

- Consider restricting access to non-essential visitors.
- Postpone or cancel planned activities, such as sports, music or theatre events.
- Encourage children with high risk medical conditions to utilize online or home education options.
- Consider partial school dismissal such as:
 - Shorter school days where students on meal programs could still pick up bagged breakfast and lunch meals.
 - A 3-day school week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday that would allow a 4-day block of time where mixing between students is minimized and would provide time for enhanced cleaning.
 - Partial attendance by grade which may allow utilization of larger spaces for classrooms that would allow increased spacing between desks or work areas.
 - Students coming to school for exams or labs, but the majority of schoolwork is done online and at home.
- Consult with public health on school closure questions.
 - If school busing is linked strongly to transmission, then consider this as a factor for considering a school closure decision.

Resources:

- Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>
- WA DOH 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19) K-12 Schools
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus/Schools>
- DOH Handwashing to Prevent Illness at School webpage
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Schools/EnvironmentalHealth/handwashing>
- School practices to promote social distancing in K-12 schools: review of influenza pandemic policies and practices <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5870081/>



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