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Frequently Asked Questions: Guidance for Schools About the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What is the concern about COVID-19?

There is an ongoing, international outbreak of a new virus, called COVID-19, formerly known as 2019-nCoV. While many of the early cases in this outbreak primarily involved people living in Wuhan City, China, Chinese health officials have now reported thousands of cases throughout China. This virus causes a respiratory illness which includes fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and in some cases, can be fatal. It is thought that infected people will develop symptoms 2 to 14 days after an exposure.

What is being done to address the COVID-19?

On arrival to the United States, travelers from China may be asked questions to determine if they need to undergo health screening. During the health screening, authorities check temperatures, symptoms, and ask about specific exposures in China. If travelers have concerning symptoms, they will be sent for medical evaluation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) staff will provide health information cards to travelers that tell travelers what symptoms to look out for, and what to do if they develop symptoms within 14 days after leaving China. Some travelers might be asked to stay home from work or school for up to 14 days.

What are the symptoms that COVID-19 can cause?

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

How does the virus spread?

This virus probably originally emerged from an animal source but is now spreading from person-to-person. At this time, it is unclear how this virus is spreading between people; however other coronaviruses spread person-to-person via respiratory droplets created when an infected person coughs or sneezes (similar to how influenza and many other respiratory pathogens spread) and droplets infect another person.

What if a student traveled to China and has no symptoms? Can they come to school?

It depends on when the student was last in China. Students who arrived from China prior to February 4, 2020 and who are well (without symptoms) are not restricted from school or other activities. Because of the wider spread of the virus in China, potential exposures in China are now greater. Therefore, children who arrived from China on February 4 or later should stay home from school until

it's been 14 days since they left China. After the 14 day period is over, those students are able to return to school with no restrictions on their activities.

What if a student has traveled to China and is sick with fever and respiratory symptoms?

If a student who has traveled in the last 14 days to China, develops fever or respiratory symptoms (especially cough or difficulty breathing), they should stay home from school and be assessed by their primary care provider. If the student does not have a primary care provider, schools should contact the local health department for further guidance.

What if a student has traveled to China and while in school becomes sick with fever and respiratory symptoms?

If a student who has traveled in the last 14 days to China develops fever or respiratory symptoms while at school, the local health department should be notified, and a parent/guardian should pick up the student immediately. The student should wear a surgical mask (if possible) and be placed in a safe isolation area visible to the school nurse or other school health services staff e.g. Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or school health aide (Certified Nursing Assistant) and separate from the rest of the health room. Ideally this is a private room with the door closed and visibility maintained.

If you become aware of a student who recently traveled to China and develops fever or respiratory illness, call your local health department and they can assist with determining what additional evaluation is needed. At this time of the year, there are many possible causes for respiratory illness, and it is likely a medical visit for further evaluation (including laboratory testing) will be necessary.

What if a student is sick with fever and respiratory symptoms?

Any student with a fever, even without travel history, should stay home from school until fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications according to the Maryland Communicable Disease Summary. Students reporting to the health room with fever should be asked about recent travel to China.

At this time, residents of Maryland are at low risk of becoming infected with COVID-19, unless they have recently traveled to China or have come in close contact with someone who was ill who recently traveled to China. Even if an ill student has traveled to Wuhan or another area of China, or has had contact with an ill person who has traveled there, their respiratory illness may be due to a variety of other more common causes, including influenza and other common respiratory pathogens.

Students reporting to the health room with fever should be asked about travel to China within the prior 14 days. Any student with a fever, even without travel history, should stay home from school until fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications according to the Maryland Communicable Disease Summary.

General infection control guidance for schools is available on the [Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology website](#).

One of our students is an exchange student from China. Can they return home to China?

Yes. There are no restrictions for students from China to return home.

One of our schools has a school sponsored trip to China. Can they still go?

At this time, no. CDC recommends that travelers avoid non-essential travel to China. The CDC's Travelers' Health webpage should be consulted for current information.

What if we think a student may be at risk for being infected with COVID-19?

If you have concerns that a student might have been exposed to COVID-19 either through travel or some other means, contact your local health department for further guidance.

If we have a student who has been ill at school and is now a person under investigation (PUI), what do we tell the other parents and school staff?

Most people who have fever and respiratory symptoms, including people who were in China within the last 14 days, do not have COVID-19 but other causes for their illness. If a student who has been at school is determined to be a PUI, the local health department will work with schools on all the necessary next steps, including any related communications to parents or school staff. All such communications must be coordinated with the health department.

How can our school prevent infections with COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases?

The best way to prevent infection is to take precautions to avoid exposure to the virus, which are the same precautions you would take to avoid the flu. MDH always recommends everyday actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection. However, there are vaccines to prevent other common respiratory viruses such as seasonal influenza. Additional information on vaccines can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/index.html>.

Additional information about school communicable disease control, may be found at:

https://mmcp.health.maryland.gov/epsdt/healthykids/Documents/Communicable_Diseases_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Where can I get more information about COVID-19?

Additional information on COVID-19 outbreak is frequently updated on the [CDC website](#) or the Maryland Department of Health website at <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>.

Who should I contact if I have more questions about COVID-19?

If your school has additional questions or concerns about COVID-19 or any concerns about student travelers, please contact your local health department.