



2019 Novel Coronavirus and Schools - Information for School Nurses and Administrators January 31, 2020

Background

As you may know, China is experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus (2019-nCoV). This virus emerged in Hubei Province, China in December 2019. The virus is spreading from person-to-person, and cases have been detected in a number of countries internationally and the United States, including one case in Washington on January 21, 2020. The Washington case occurred in a Snohomish County resident who had recently traveled to Wuhan.

At this time, the immediate risk to the general public in Washington and the United States is considered to be low. There is no evidence that 2019-nCoV is spreading in Washington at this time.

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. They usually cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Some coronaviruses have caused more severe illness, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). 2019-nCoV is a new coronavirus that had not been seen in humans before December 2019.

Who is at risk for 2019-nCoV?

At this time, most people in Washington are not considered at risk for 2019-nCoV infection and do not need to seek medical evaluation for the virus.

How is the novel coronavirus infection spread?

Experts believe that the 2019-nCoV primarily spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplets from a cough or sneeze can travel up to about six feet. Another person can become infected if these droplets enter their mouth, nose or eyes directly or through their contaminated hands. An infected person who coughs or sneezes into their hands and touches surfaces can contaminate surfaces such as phones, tables, door handles, or toys. While some coronaviruses can be spread to others through contaminated surfaces, coronaviruses generally do not survive on surfaces for a prolonged period of time. It takes 2 to 14 days after a person gets the virus in their body to become ill.

Who should seek medical evaluation for 2019-nCoV?

Students, staff, and volunteers who are:

- Ill with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from China in the last 14 days
OR
- Ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have been identified by Public Health as a recent close contact of a confirmed 2019-nCoV case or had recent close contact with someone who is being evaluated for 2019-nCoV infection.

What should I do if I suspect a student, staff member, or volunteer is at risk for 2019-nCoV?

If a student, staff member, or volunteer meets the above criteria, it is important to place them in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a facemask. Immediately notify your [local health department](#). They will provide you with guidance.

Should all children returning from China stay home from school for 14 days?

Yes. The White House Coronavirus Task Force announced on January 31, 2020 that all people returning from China will be asked to stay at home away from others and monitor their health for 14 days.

What can I do to prevent 2019-nCoV infections in my school?

Schools do not need to take any special precautions beyond what is normally recommended to prevent the spread of germs in schools. You can help students and staff reduce their risk for getting and spreading viral respiratory infections, including the flu and the common cold, by encouraging them to take simple steps which will also prevent 2019-nCoV. These include:

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home while sick and avoid close contact with others.
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash hands.

In addition, we recommend that schools be sure to follow their regular cleaning and disinfection program.

- Clean hard surfaces (desks, tables, countertops, sinks) daily. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (door handles, faucets, railings), bathrooms and health rooms at least once a day. Use alcohol wipes to clean keyboards.
- Clean surfaces with fragrance-free soap or third-party certified cleaners. Thorough cleaning with soap and water will remove most microorganisms.
- Use EPA safer disinfectants registered for influenza on hard surfaces. Clean the surface first to remove all organic matter. Apply the proper concentration of disinfectant and allow the required wet contact time. Pay close attention to hazard warnings and instructions for using personal protective items such as gloves and eye protection. Use disinfectants in a sufficiently ventilated space.
- Disinfecting is the responsibility of school custodial staff. They are trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills – blood, vomit, feces, and urine. Contact your custodian or school nurse if students are ill and your classroom needs cleaning and disinfection.

Where can I turn for more information?

- [Novel Coronavirus Outbreak 2020](#), Washington State Department of Health
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus, Wuhan, China](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Guidance for Travelers](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Washington State Department of Health novel coronavirus call center: 1-800-525-0127 and press #
- [Classroom Cleaning - Tips for Teachers](#)
- [Handwashing to Prevent Illness at School](#)
- [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff, OSPI, 2014 \(PDF\)](#)

As with any newly emerging infectious disease, knowledge evolves with time. Early on, it is difficult to know the ways in which the disease spreads, how effectively it spreads from person to person, and how severe the infection is. We will continue to update the [DOH novel coronavirus website](#) as more information becomes available.