



PK-12 Guidance in Response to COVID-19

Overview

Education programs are essential for children and families and withstanding a pandemic is important. COVID-19 is impacting these essential services, as families and local officials must make difficult decisions to keep children and their families safe, while recognizing the broader impact of closing schools and childcare settings.

As such, we must establish clear guidance on when to suspend these vital services to provide for the best interest of the public we serve. The Department of Education does not recommend pre-emptive school closure at this time, but it is recommended that schools and childcare centers employ the following mitigation strategies depending on associated risk in their area.

Mitigation Practices

Mitigation practices all schools **should** start today:

1. Implement common-sense practices for preventing disease spread, such as: covering a cough, staying home when sick, and washing hands.
2. Ensure that employees and children are not admitted to school when ill. If you suspect a child or individual has COVID-19, send them home and have them call their primary healthcare provider. Healthcare practitioners are equipped to screen individuals and to refer for additional testing, if needed.
3. Cancel or reduce large events and gatherings, such as assemblies and field trips.
4. Cancel all field trips to identified areas of risk, as determined by CDC and IDPH, and other activities that fall outside of educational programming.
 - School administrators should consider the impact of canceling trips to identified areas of risk as determined by CDC and IDPH.
5. Use spring break as an additional opportunity to conduct a deep-clean; disinfecting surfaces and objects that are high touch areas.
6. Continue daily cleaning as normal.
7. Coordinate with local public health officials and your local emergency management coordinators.

Mitigation practices for schools with an outbreak in your area:

1. Cancel large meetings and other events.
2. Put your infectious disease outbreak plan into action.
3. Practice Social Distancing. Avoid mixing students and stagger passing times.
4. Limit school visitors and deliveries from outside vendors who typically interact with students, and assess all campus visitors for illness and risk of exposure.
5. Consider school dismissals if staff or student absenteeism impacts the ability to remain open. Short-term closures may also be necessary to facilitate public health investigation and/or cleaning, if a case is diagnosed in a student or staff member.
6. Prior to any short-term closure, please coordinate with IDPH.

The health and safety of our students, teachers, and administrators are of the utmost importance.

Employee Health

Schools must be flexible with staff who report illness or are caring for ill family members.

1. For staff participating in a state employee insurance plan, insurers may be waiving prior authorization, testing, and offering virtual health visits and 24/7 help to ensure access to care.

Student Health

Communicate with your school nurse to address vulnerable students with health conditions that may place them at risk.

The following guidance is designed to help district leaders determine when, or if, it is in the best interest of the public to consider closing schools to mitigate substantial spread of COVID-19.

Decision-Making Process

What risks may be eliminated by closing schools?

- Exposure to COVID-19 through high touch surfaces, spread through indirect exposure, and risk of exposure for susceptible children and adults.

What risks may be enhanced by closing schools?

- Loss of child care, decreased access to school nutrition programs, financial strain to individuals and communities.

When should schools close?

- The Iowa Department of Public Health has identified large scale community spread of COVID-19 in your school community and has assessed public risk for exposure would be greater than the benefit of remaining open.

When should schools reopen?

- After implementing recommendations of containment and receiving approval from Iowa Department of Public Health based on data available by national and state health departments.