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Florida Department of Education Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19 March 11, 2020

How can I protect myself and my students from COVID-19?

There are some common-sense precautions that you can take that apply to many infectious diseases.

- The most important precaution is frequent hand washing with soap and water and the use of 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands.
- Encourage people around you to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Helpful prevention and treatment guidelines can be found on the CDC's website: [Prevention and Treatment](#) and [Guidelines for Hand Hygiene](#)

How can schools prevent the spread of COVID-19?

As COVID-19 evolves, the most important thing for schools to do is plan and prepare. Schools should do the following when it comes to planning and preparing:

- Review, update and implement emergency operations plans in collaboration with your local health departments.
- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Develop information-sharing systems with parents and local partners.
- Perform routine cleaning, including frequently touched surfaces.

How can we combat the spread of germs in schools?

- CDC [Guidance for Administrations of Childcare and K-12 Schools](#) has provided guidance for administrators at both the school and district level to plan, prepare, and respond to COVID-19. This resource provides information for schools which do not have COVID-19 identified in their community and for schools with identified cases of COVID-19 in their communities.
- Encourage students to remember if they cough to cover their mouth, and if they sneeze, to sneeze into a tissue and immediately dispose of the tissue.
- Stop the spread of germs: regularly clean and disinfect objects and surfaces around you that are touched frequently.
- Avoid touching your hands, nose and mouth.
- Develop lessons that reinforce and teach handwashing with your students and make sure they know the steps to take when washing their hands.

Spring Break is coming up, should students be traveling internationally, or in the United States?

With educators, students, and families returning from spring break soon, FDOE recommends state colleges and K-12 school districts strictly follow CDC International Travel Advisory Guidelines, per the Florida Department of Health (FDOH), which is advising all individuals who have traveled internationally to follow the [new CDC guidelines](#), summarized below:

- [If you have traveled to China, Iran, Italy or South Korea \(Warning Level 3\)](#): CDC recommends 14-day self-isolation and social distancing upon return to the United States. Social distancing includes avoiding going out in public and close personal interactions.
 - A person that experiences a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after travel from China, Italy, Iran, South Korea, Japan and any other destination under a [CDC travel advisory](#) should call ahead to their health care provider and local county health department (CHD) and mention their recent travel or close contact.
- [If you have traveled to Japan \(Alert Level 2\)](#): CDC recommends that travelers should monitor their health and limit interactions with others for 14 days after returning to the United States. If you become symptomatic, immediately self-isolate and contact your county health department before visiting your health care provider.
 - If a person has had close contact with an individual who has recently traveled to these destinations and has shown symptoms, they should also call their county health department and health care provider. The health care provider will work with the Department of Health to determine if that person should be tested for COVID-19.
- [Cruises](#): CDC recommends travelers defer all cruise ship travel worldwide.
 - Based on the CDC guidance, FDOE recommends that if you are returning from a cruise, and are symptomatic to self-isolate and contact your [doctor and local health department](#).
- **Regarding work-related travel**, consider using the same recommendations for both employees and student-groups. Look ahead to upcoming travel for the next three months and put together criteria to make consistent determinations about travel, especially considering that information and requirements/recommendations from the Department of Health can change.
- For more information regarding current CDC travel advisories related to COVID-19, [click here](#).

Should schools cancel field trips?

FDOE is strongly recommending that K-12 school districts and state colleges temporarily postpone all out-of-state, by plane, field trips.

- While this is just a recommendation and we understand the complications this can create in the near term, we believe this recommendation is in the best interests of the health of all students, teachers and staff.

What happens if my school runs out of soap and sanitizing products?

The health and safety of Florida's students continues to be our top priority, and the Department has been in contact with each district regularly to ensure they have the resources they need, no district has indicated they are low on sanitary resources at this time.

If my child gets COVID-19, will their absence be excused?

Currently, no children in Florida have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Florida is considered low-risk. We recommend reaching out to your local school district or school to find out what their policy is on absences.

If a student is suspected to have COVID-19, what should I do?

The goal is containment to stop any transmission.

If a student has flu like symptoms, but has not traveled or come in contact with someone that has traveled recently traveled from China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, or Japan, or gone on a cruise, direct parents to call their doctor and keep the student home.

However, if the student has traveled or come in contact with an individual that has traveled to those countries, or has traveled themselves, contact the local health department and then the doctor.

Is there a plan in Florida to close schools?

Not at this time. Ultimately, every school district, school and state college must work with their local county health departments directly on a preparedness plan that includes school closure information.

The CDC has said that children are less likely to become infected, or their symptoms were so mild that their infection escaped detection.

The World Health Organization said of the tens of thousands of cases in China, less than 3% were in children. Of that 3%, over 98% of those children only had minor symptoms. In China, only 8.1% of cases were 20-somethings, 1.2% were teens, and 0.9% were 9 or younger. The World Health Organization mission to China found that 78% of the cases reported as of Feb. 20 were in people ages 30 to 69.

With that being said, we know that our students do come in contact with grandparents, neighbors, and friends so we continue to push that students need to continue washing their hands for 20 seconds, use 60% alcohol based sanitizer, especially when visiting with elderly adults to keep all Floridians safe.

Moreover, we all recognize that schools are a convening point for communities and we will work carefully with educational institutions at all levels should the need arise to consider a closure.

Are students in danger of getting COVID-19? Who is most at risk?

Currently, there is still a low risk in Florida. In fact, [recent research](#) published by leading physicians in the New England Journal of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) found that children are less likely to become infected. Elderly and individuals with underlying medical conditions are more likely to be impacted by COVID-19.

Should I use hand sanitizer or soap and water?

Soap and water is the most effective preventative measure. As an important everyday [preventative measure](#) for the spread of viruses, CDC recommends washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is not available, using alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol will prevent the spread of the virus.

What are schools doing to combat Coronavirus?

Each school district has a preparedness plan, is working with local health departments, has been provided educational resources about cleanliness and hand washing, and Florida Virtual School has been in contact with each district to offer assistance in the event of school closures. Considering continued general provisions for environmental health ([s. 381.006\(6\), Florida Statutes](#)), educational facilities are required to detect and prevent disease caused by natural and manmade factors in the environment.

Should sports and outside classroom activities be cancelled?

Currently, Florida students are at a low risk. It is the decision of each school district to adjust extracurricular and sporting activities according to the needs of their communities.

Is the department recommending that our elderly population avoid Florida schools?

We recommend that all Florida residents take necessary precautions to avoid getting sick. Older Floridians should stay away from sick individuals. If you are planning to visit an elderly individual, and have been sick in the past two weeks, call ahead prior to scheduling any visits. The CDC recommends that older adults should stay home as much as possible, as they are more likely to develop coronavirus.

Where can I get more information about COVID-19?

- Schools, school districts, colleges and universities are encouraged to [contact their local health department for the most up-to-date information](#) regarding COVID-19. County health departments are fully integrated with the FDOH and the CDC, and are well equipped to respond if necessary.
- Please visit FDOH's dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#) or FDOE's [webpage](#) for information and guidance regarding COVID-19 in Florida.
- For any other questions related to COVID-19 in Florida, please contact the FDOH's dedicated COVID-19 Call Center by calling **1-(866) 779-6121**. **The Call**

Center is available 24 hours a day. Inquiries may also be emailed to COVID-19@flhealth.gov.

- Helpful information can also be found at the following websites:
 - FDOH: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/>
 - CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/>
 - FDOE: <http://fldoe.org/em-response/>
 - Please see this [helpful flier](#) from the CDC related to handwashing and hand sanitizer.
 - Please see this [helpful flier](#) from the CDC related to stopping the spread of germs.
 - CDC has published [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to COVID-19](#).
 - CDC has also published [Interim Guidance for Business and Employers](#), we strongly suggest school districts and school administration to review this guidance.

What should I do if I had close contact with someone who has COVID-19?

If you have come in contact with an individual that has recently traveled to China, Italy, Iran, South Korea or Japan or have traveled to these locations yourself, and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:

- Call your local county health department.
- Seek medical care. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus to others. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- CDC has additional [specific guidance for travelers](#) available online.