

**Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education**  
**John A. Wilson Building | 1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Suite 307 | Washington, DC 20004**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**March 8, 2020**

### **How can I protect myself and my family from COVID-19?**

You play an important role in stopping the spread of germs. Please, [view resources to share with your family, friends and within your community.](#)

The symptoms that are currently being seen with COVID-19 are fever and respiratory symptoms such as cough and shortness of breath. To help prevent the spread of germs, you should:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if you have symptoms of acute respiratory illness.
- Stay home from work or school until you are free of fever, signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours and without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medications.
- Seek medical attention if you have reason to believe you have been exposed to coronavirus or influenza. Call your healthcare provider before visiting a healthcare facility.

### **What should I expect to see in my child's school?**

The DME, DCPS, OSSE and the PCSB are in close and regular contact with school leaders, sharing CDC and DC Health guidance, and supporting ongoing preparedness efforts. At this time, you should expect to see enhanced cleaning activities, and stronger personal hygiene routines, including more regular hand-washing.

Your school should be in touch with you soon concerning contingency planning for remote learning if your school needs to close temporarily.

### **How and when will the city make decisions about school closures?**

In the District, Mayor Bowser will make decisions regarding school closures in close partnership with DC Health and the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency. As of Sunday, March 8, DC's public schools will remain open based on guidance from DC Health. The District Government is closely monitoring the situation and will advise school communities if anything changes.

On February 28, Mayor Bowser signed a [Mayor's Order](#) to establish DC Health and the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency as the lead agencies directing the

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District's preparation, monitoring, and response. Nine working groups were also established to coordinate around issues that may arise from the impacts of COVID-19.

**How will learning continue if schools close?**

All public schools have been tasked with preparing for remote learning in the unlikely event of a school closure. This includes readying e-learning applications that students use at school for home use, loaned devices and take-home work assignments. Please connect with your child's school to learn more about their plans to address learning outside of school in the event of a closure.

Private and parochial schools are similarly developing remote learning plans.

For Early Childhood Education, families should continue their usual, active engagement with their children, including reading and singing and art and games. Resources for home-based learning for this age group are available [here](#).

**Will students still be able to receive breakfast and lunch if their school is closed?**

For DCPS schools, in the unlikely event of a school closure, school officials will determine whether it is safe and feasible to provide school meals for students, including but not limited to, establishing a schedule for meal pick-up at an alternative location near to the school, such as a recreation center. In the event of a school closure, school officials will communicate with families whether such alternative meal arrangements are possible and if they are possible what the specific plans are.

For charter schools, each school administrator will determine whether it is feasible to provide school meals for students at an alternate location. In the event of a school closure, charter school leaders will communicate with families regarding alternative meal arrangements.

**I just returned from a trip outside of the United States to a country where COVID-19 has been identified. Can I go to school/work?**

Residents should seek medical attention if you have reason to believe you have been exposed to coronavirus or influenza. Call your healthcare provider before visiting a healthcare facility.

The symptoms that are currently being seen with COVID-19 are fever and respiratory symptoms such as cough and shortness of breath. If you have recently returned from an area where COVID-19 has been identified and believe you have come into contact with the virus, you are advised to consult with state and local health providers to determine immediate next steps.

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**What can schools expect if a member of their community such as a student or teacher tests positive for Coronavirus?**

Each case is different and would be evaluated based on the specific circumstances and the risk of prior and current exposure to other members of the community. DC Health and school officials will quickly and carefully assess individual circumstances before communicating a plan to students, families and staff. In some circumstances, the school might remain open with changes in its daily procedures to reduce congregate activities. In cases of high risk, schools might need to be closed to ensure the safety of students and staff and mitigate community spread.

In all cases, the school in question will require a “deep cleaning” of the facility. Schools and centers will work with the appropriate teams to complete necessary cleaning protocols. DCPS, for example, has confirmed a plan to conduct such deep cleanings should the need arise; similarly, Charter LEAs and independent schools should be making arrangements to undertake deep school cleanings should the need arise.

In the event of a closure, DC Health would determine the duration of the closure with consideration of multiple factors.

**How will events related to the Coronavirus, like quarantines or school closure, affect my child’s attendance record?**

As always, the District remains committed to ensuring our students receive the highest quality education possible. Attendance and instructional days are critical to achieving that goal. It is our collective aim to provide reasonable accommodations given the evolving nature of this situation. Absences that are a direct result of the virus will not result in a student being penalized.

| <u>Reason for Absence</u>                                | <u>Outcome</u>   |
|--|--|
| School closure   | Student attendance would be unaffected because the school would update the calendar to reflect that school was not in session that day.  |
| Student is ill and kept out as a precaution by parent    | Students would be marked “absent – excused” if a doctor’s note or other documentation deemed adequate is provided.   |
| School community member is under self-imposed quarantine | In the case of students and families who may need to be quarantined and are not allowed to go to school, the city will provide further guidance as to what documentation, if any, will be needed to denote an excused absence. |

**Will my student still get services as described in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) if there are changes to school because of public health actions?**

Schools will continue to provide students with Disabilities the services in their IEP and will work with individual families and IEP teams to create plans appropriate for each student.

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**Will my infant/toddler still get services as described in their Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) during public health actions?**

If the Strong Start program is open, services will continue. Strong Start will work with individual families if specific providers or locations become unavailable

**Will schools continue to take school trips to other parts of the US? What about other countries?**

On March 4, DCPS announced it was suspending DCPS-sponsored student international travel until May 1. DCPS will continue to monitor this situation closely and will provide an update related to international student travel plans beyond this date. DC PCSB shared the DCPS letter and guidance with individual charter LEAs. Each charter campus is making site-specific determinations on international travel.

At this time, there are no restrictions on domestic travel in the US, based on CDC and DC Health guidance. Individual schools and school operators should use their best judgment about trips within the US, considering multiple factors. Please reach out to DC Health with any concerns or questions about specific trips.

**Is my child at risk? What can I do to keep my child safe at school?**

While the presence of COVID-19 in the District is concerning, it is not unexpected given the spread of the virus globally and in the United States. In general, the risk to District residents remains low at this time. During the winter season, many other viruses that cause respiratory illness, such as flu, are common. Precautions that are recommended for avoiding colds, flu and other respiratory illnesses include good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene: covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands frequently, and staying home when sick. Please, [view resources to share with your family, friends and within your community](#).

**Can schools share information about whether anyone in the school community is being tested for COVID-19?**

No. School leaders cannot divulge student or staff personal health information to other parents, as this violates HIPPA laws. If communication needs to be sent to a school community regarding a suspected or confirmed case within a school, DCPS will coordinate with DC Health to ensure all required communications go out to the school community.

**Where can I get more information?**

The District Government will continue to share critical updates around coronavirus on the DC Health website, [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov).