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Guidance for Schools: Preparing for COVID-19

As a school administrator, there are steps you can take now to lessen the impact of a severe infectious disease outbreak in your school. It is important to review your health policies and emergency plans to ensure you're prepared if COVID-19 infections begin to spread in our community.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) is developing specific guidance for schools in response to COVID-19. Coronavirus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to influenza and is thought to be spread in the same way. The following strategies to prepare for a flu pandemic are a good starting point for your COVID-19 planning.

Create a Culture of Health in Your School

- Always promote healthy hygiene habits. Make sure students and staff have access to **warm water and soap or hand sanitizer** with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, and trash baskets. **Small children should only use hand sanitizer under adult supervision.*
- Remind parents to **keep sick children at home**. Students should be symptom-free and fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines before returning to school.
- Also **encourage staff to stay home when they're sick**. The same rules apply - employees should be symptom-free and fever-free for at least 24 hours before returning to school.
- Follow your standard procedures for **routine cleaning and disinfecting**. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys.

Planning Ahead

- Plan for staff and student absences. Develop **flexible attendance and sick-leave policies** that you can enact in a severe outbreak. Staff may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school dismissals.
- Review your process for planning school events. Identify actions to take if you need **to postpone or cancel events**, such as sporting and special events.
- Identify space that can be used to **separate sick people if possible**. If an employee or student gets sick at school and cannot leave immediately, designate a separate area just for sick people if possible.
- Consider **how you will handle school dismissals** if public health recommends temporary school closures to lessen the spread of illness.

- Colleges and universities should also **identify strategies to continue essential student services** like meals, health, and social services. These plans should address students who are not able to return home, like international and out-of-state students.

Discourage Stigma & Discrimination

It's also important to be mindful of the language you use and the policies you enact, ensuring you do not inadvertently promote stigma and discrimination. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed coronavirus infection.

More Information for Schools

The CDC has pandemic influenza planning guidance, information, and resources for schools on its website. These materials may be helpful as you prepare for COVID-19:

<https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/school/index.html>