

February 10, 2020

Dear School Health and Childcare Providers,

You have likely heard of the expanding outbreak of respiratory illness that is associated with a novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Right now, this virus is not spreading in the community in the United States and the vast majority of Americans have a low risk of exposure.

Though Colorado has no cases of COVID-19, the department is taking this public health threat very seriously, closely monitoring the outbreak and refining Colorado's response. Our efforts right now include providing information about the outbreak and how to report suspect cases to local health departments and health care providers. The department is also coordinating with local public health agencies to determine the need for monitoring, quarantine, or other restriction of movement and activities for travelers returning from China.

We understand that new viruses like this can be worrisome, especially to students, parents, and staff. We echo the CDC's statement that the risk to people in the United States is low at this time. It's important to convey that risk is based on exposure. People at higher risk for exposure are:

- People who have traveled to China within the last two weeks and have symptoms.
- People who had direct close contact with someone who was confirmed to have the novel coronavirus.
- And like any other virus, no identity, community, ethnic, or racial group in Colorado is more at risk for getting or spreading 2019 novel coronavirus.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that have been associated with respiratory illness such as fever, cough and shortness of breath. Illness is spread through coughing or sneezing, much like the flu. Some coronaviruses are common and regularly cause respiratory illness in the U.S. in the fall and winter. Other coronaviruses like MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV have caused outbreaks internationally and have been known to cause severe illness. Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory viruses spread.

A person who tests positive for coronavirus on a regular test from the doctor's office does not have COVID-19, but instead has one of the regularly circulating coronaviruses which cause

cold symptoms. COVID-19 can only be diagnosed through special testing done at a public health laboratory.

It is important to remind parents and students who are worried about COVID-19 or any respiratory virus that they can protect themselves by practicing everyday preventive actions:

- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.
- Get a flu shot if you haven't gotten one this year.

School and child care settings can also help control the spread of respiratory pathogens by regularly cleaning and sanitizing high touch surfaces (door knobs, hand rails, etc.).

The outbreak of COVID-19 is changing rapidly, the CDC is providing updated information on their Coronavirus web page here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

The department and your local public health agency will work with the school nurse to assess the situation and communicate appropriate control measures.

We will share additional information and guidance as it becomes available. If you have specific questions about COVID-19, please call your local public health agency or CDPHE at 303.692.2700.

Thank you,



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