

# Updated COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations

## Implications for K-12 Schools and Childcare

Revised 3-11-20, 6:00 pm

COVID-19 is spreading in King County, with hundreds of cases having been reported to date. We expect the case count to double every 5–7 days. The public health approach is implementing community mitigation strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are asking individuals, businesses, schools, and healthcare providers and community-based organizations to take steps to help everyone comply with the recommendations. We have also released [guidance for anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 and their contacts on how to prevent the spread to others](#). The goals for using mitigation strategies for communities with local COVID-19 transmission are to protect:

- Individuals at risk for severe illness, including older adults and people of any age with underlying health conditions
- The healthcare workforce and critical infrastructure workforces so that sick people can get the medical care they need and other aspects of the community can continue to function

**As of March 11, Public Health is no longer able to notify school leadership or conduct contract tracing in each school that has a case or cases of COVID-19.** With the increase in cases and testing in the community, Public Health does not have information about all cases. In addition, Public Health is shifting to a surveillance strategy that does not include individual case investigations for all reports.

### New Directives from the Governor and Health Officer

On March 11, 2020, Governor Jay Inslee issued an emergency proclamation outlining actions to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in communities in Washington where COVID-19 is spreading. In King County, Dr. Jeff Duchin, Health Officer for Public Health – Seattle & King County, also issued directives to minimize the health impacts of COVID-19. These actions are also known as “community mitigation” strategies.

#### Mandate on Events

In light of the increasing COVID-19 outbreak, in King County the following directive applies until rescinded by the Health Officer:

- Prohibits events with more than 250 attendees
- Permits events with fewer than 250 attendees if event organizers take steps to minimize risk:
  - People at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are encouraged not to attend (aged 60 or over, those with underlying health conditions, and pregnant people).
  - Close, face-to-face contact is limited.
  - Proper hand washing facilities are available and surfaces are cleaned.

Neither of these mandates on events is intended to prohibit the normal operations of schools.

## School and Childcare Mitigation Strategies

Health officials considered the range of potential benefits and negative consequences of school closures when making recommendations. This includes:

- the available data on the potential benefits of school closures
- the severity of disease among school-aged children (children and youth have not been shown at high risk for COVID-19)
- the potential risk to staff
- the potential risk to vulnerable household members of students
- the impacts on families and employers (including the healthcare system)
- the role schools play in providing nutrition and other critical resources to students.

### School and childcare strategies:

- At this point, we are not recommending widespread closure of schools and childcare programs. However, we are watching the outbreak closely and may determine that closures are necessary.
- Schools and childcare programs should **prepare** now for possible prolonged mandatory closures (weeks to months).
- Schools should use their discretion to close anytime they cannot meet the educational mission due to staff and student absences. We respect a school's decision to close as they know the needs of their community best.
- A critical part of the planning must include how schools can continue to provide non-educational supports for their students such as providing food, developmental disability supports, and school-based healthcare.
- Follow community mitigation strategies for schools as outlined in the [CDC community mitigation guidance](#)):
  - Social distancing measures (e.g., stagger recess times, entry/dismissal times; alter schedules to reduce interactions among students; cancel assemblies and gatherings; postpone sporting events and inter-school competitions)
  - Monitor for illness in students, staff and volunteers
  - If your school has a case of COVID-19, consider short-term school dismissals as needed for cleaning, and while you are identifying close contacts of the ill person

## Guidance for decision-making for school closures

Although there's not currently a mandate to close King County schools, every school district has the authority to determine whether to close a school when there's a confirmed case of COVID-19.

We are providing the following guidance to schools and childcares about how to respond if they identify a case of COVID-19 in a student, staff member, or volunteer at their school and to inform their decision making.

When making decisions about whether and for how long to dismiss classrooms or close a school or childcare, weigh the potential benefits gained by reducing the potential for COVID-19 transmission in the school with the impacts of closing. The public health and social impacts of interrupting access to meals, school-based healthcare, and services for medically fragile students are important considerations

when determining whether closure is warranted, and it is important to have a plan for how those needs will be met for students during closures.

**We do not currently have a case in our school or childcare. What should we do?**

Childcare and K-12 school administrators can take the following steps to help prepare for cases of COVID-19 in the school setting as well as more widespread community transmission during which school closures might be recommended or required by Public Health:

- Implement social distancing measures to limit close contact, such as staggering recess times and cancelling assemblies, inter-school competitions, and sporting events.
- Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).
- Develop information-sharing systems with partners.
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism.
- Establish procedures for identifying and sending home students and staff who are sick at school.
- Establish procedures for how students in need will access non-educational services such as meals and school health services during times of closure.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning.
- Create communications plans for use with the school community.
- Review “School Planning and Preparedness for COVID-19” and [CDC’s community mitigation guidance](#).

For a more additional information on schools and COVID-19 please refer to the [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools](#) and Public Health’s School Planning and Preparedness for COVID-19 document.

**We have a case of COVID-19 in our school or childcare community. What should we do?**

Consider closing if:

- The individual infected with COVID-19 spent time in the school or childcare setting and had close contact with others while ill. Close contact includes scenarios like living with or caring for a person with confirmed COVID-19, being within 6 feet of a confirmed case for about 10 minutes, or if someone with COVID-19 has coughed on you, kissed you, shared utensils with you or you have had direct contact with their body secretions.
- You are observing that high rates of absenteeism among staff and/or students hinders your ability to meet your educational mission.

**If our school decides to close, how long should we remain closed for?**

Consider an initial temporary closure for 2–5 days to assess whether there is a single isolated case of COVID-19 with minimal close contact with others or if there are multiple students or staff ill or exposed contacts of the case (for whom home isolation or quarantine would be recommended). If widespread illness or clusters of illness are detected or if isolation and quarantine recommendations result in significant absenteeism so that the school cannot meet their educational mission, consider extending the length of closure to at least 14 days.

Alternatively, schools can consider an initial closure for 14 days, which represents incubation period for COVID-19. Within that timeframe, most individuals infected with COVID-19 would begin to develop symptoms, although healthy persons especially children can have very mild illness. Symptomatic individuals should be advised to self-isolate for 7 days OR until 72 hours from the time that fever has resolved (and symptoms get better) – whichever is longer. Other students and staff should self-quarantine at home and should not be gathering in other locations. Students and staff who do not develop illness may return to school at the end of the 14-day quarantine.

The situation is rapidly evolving and we expect continued community transmission. School administrators should expect that additional cases will occur when the school reopens.

#### **What steps should be taken during an extended closure?**

- [Conduct routine environmental cleaning](#) of frequently touched surfaces.
- If possible, assess what close contacts the case had while ill. Notify close contacts and ask that they self-quarantine for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.
- Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events. Cancel or postpone events such as after-school assemblies and pep rallies, field trips, and sporting events.
- Discourage students and staff from gathering or socializing elsewhere such as at places like a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or retail areas. This reduces the potential for transmission.
- Provide continuity of education to the extent possible. OSPI does not recommend closed schools transition to an online distance model unless the district can ensure a number of considerations can be met regarding equal access, sufficient training, and system security.
- To the fullest extent possible, continue to provide non-educational supports for students such as providing food, special education services, and school health services.
- Consider ways to distribute food to students who are eligible for free/reduced meals, such as "grab-and-go" bagged lunches or meal delivery. If your school provides essential medical services for students, explore options to maintain these services either within the school setting or at home.
- Work on communication to families and staff to ensure that when school re-opens, ill people know to remain home until well and that those with COVID-19-like symptoms self-isolate for 7 days OR until 72 hours from the time that fever has resolved (and symptoms get better) -- whichever is longer.

#### **If we dismiss school, what do we need to consider when re-opening the facility to students?**

- Advise students and staff to stay home if they have cough, fever, or shortness of breath, or are otherwise ill. Parents should also avoid entering the school if they are ill.
- Continuously communicate with all students, staff, and volunteers about [steps everyone can take to protect themselves and prevent further spread](#), including: avoiding ill people, minimizing non-essential activities in the community, frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds, Implement health monitoring practices to detect illness and prevent exposures in school:
  - Advise staff to monitor for students who may be exhibiting COVID-19 or other respiratory symptoms, and notify healthcare personnel within the school. Separate ill students and staff from others, immediately send ill persons home, and advise them to call their healthcare provider.
  - Consider asking parents to check their children's temperature and asking staff to check their own temperature daily before arrival at school. If the temperature exceeds 100.4°F or if the person has cough, advise the student or staff member to isolate at home.
- Consider having the attendance secretary or registrar collect information about the reason for each student's absence. This information can help determine whether absence is due to illness or other causes.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning by regularly disinfecting frequently touched surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, light switches, countertops). Refer to guidance from the CDC: [\\_](#)

[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html)

- Continue to review and update your district’s emergency operations plan so that you can be best prepared for the possibility of more local cases.

Please see “School Planning and Preparedness for COVID-19” more resources.

These recommendations may be updated as the outbreak evolves.

## Sharing resources with families and staff

Childcare and K-12 administrators can also support their school community by sharing **resources** with students (if resources are age-appropriate), their families, and staff:

- Information about COVID-19 from [www.kingcounty.gov/covid](http://www.kingcounty.gov/covid).
- Subscribe to our blog, Public Health Insider ([publichealthinsider.com](http://publichealthinsider.com))
- General CDC fact sheets to help staff and students’ families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
  - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19](#)
- CDC Information on [COVID-19 and children](#)
- CDC information for staff, students, and their families who have recently traveled back to the United States from areas where CDC has identified community spread of coronavirus:
  - A list of countries where community spread of COVID-19 is occurring can be found on the CDC webpage: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#)

## Travel

For questions about students who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC’s [FAQ for travelers](#).

Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials. COVID-19 information for travel is updated regularly on the CDC [website](#).

*These recommendations may be updated as the outbreak evolves. Public Health appreciates your patience and partnership as we respond to the daily challenges that COVID-19 presents to our community. Frequent updates on this emerging situation: [www.kingcounty.gov/covid](http://www.kingcounty.gov/covid)*