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Novel Coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV) Information for Schools

Many school administrators, teachers and parents within New Jersey are concerned about how the current outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in Asia will impact their communities and wish to take appropriate steps to mitigate any risks. The word “novel” means new. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working hard to learn as much as possible about this new virus so that they can better understand how it spreads and its associated illness. The New Jersey Department of Health is also working hard by developing guidance and education materials should this new virus impact our residents.

What is the difference between seasonal and novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses and there are different types of coronavirus within that family, much like there are different types of influenza viruses. Coronaviruses in general are not new, they are quite common and are a frequent cause of respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Coronaviruses tend to circulate in the fall and winter months, similar to influenza. Most people get infected with these viruses at some point in their lives.

The type of coronavirus that has recently emerged in Wuhan, China is a new type of coronavirus and is infecting people for the first time (which means that people do not have any immunity to it).

What are common symptoms of 2019-nCoV?

Information to date suggests this virus is causing symptoms consistent with a respiratory illness such as cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

How is 2019-nCoV spread?

At this time, it’s unclear how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people. Chinese officials report that sustained person-to-person spread in the community is occurring in China. Person-to-person spread in the United States has not yet been detected, but it’s likely to occur to some extent. Cases in healthcare settings, like hospitals, may also occur.

How is 2019-nCoV treated?

Currently, there is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for the coronavirus. There is no vaccine to prevent this virus, and the CDC advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

What precautions should be taken for a person who traveled to China?

The CDC recommends that travelers avoid non-essential travel to Wuhan, China. Chinese officials have closed transport within and out of Wuhan.

If a person travelled to China in the last 14 days and is sick with fever, cough or difficulty breathing they should:

- Seek medical care right away. 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.
- 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. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

If a traveler who returns from China is not ill, they may continue to attend school.

What preventive measures should a school take to help reduce the spread of respiratory illness?

NJDOH recommends that schools and childcare settings increase education on respiratory hygiene. Staff and children (as developmentally appropriate) should all be taught and asked to follow these steps that prevent the transmission of respiratory infections:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use alcohol based
- hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home if you're sick, especially with a fever.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

Additional preventive measures include:

- Adhere to exclusion recommendations from public health. For acute respiratory illness; fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication. Doctors notes for return do not supersede public health recommendation.
- Separate sick students and staff from others until they can be picked up to go home.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy, and the provision of supplies.
- Get a flu shot – it's not too late to be protected!

School Cleaning Procedures

Special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illness. Schools should follow standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an EPA-registered product.

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.

Outbreaks involving novel coronaviruses evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change frequently as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information.

For more information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.htm>
- New Jersey Department of Health website at:
<https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>
<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/schoolhealth.shtml>