

# Public Health Advisory

February 27, 2020

## Updated COVID-19 Guidance for School Administrators and School Nurses

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is offering additional information and guidance to school administrators and school nurses regarding infection caused by the new coronavirus, now known as COVID-19, first identified in Wuhan, China in late December 2019. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is in the process of developing guidance for childcare programs, K-12 schools, and colleges/universities to help them plan and prepare for COVID-19 and respond if there is a local outbreak in their community. RIDOH will distribute that guidance as soon as it is available.

At this time, Rhode Island has no confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the risk to our residents remains low. At the same time, the risk for the influenza virus is very high.

The vast majority of reported cases of COVID-19 are in China. Confirmed cases of this respiratory virus associated with travel from Wuhan are also being reported in a growing number of countries, including the United States. Some person-to-person spread of this virus outside China has been detected and the risk to Rhode Island residents remains low at this time; however, it is important for us to be prepared in the event we do start to see community spread of the virus here.

We know that outbreaks of new virus infections are always of public health concern. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), other federal agencies, and our clinical partners to share the most up to date information available.

It is important to note that at this time, Rhode Island residents are much more likely to become sick with a cold, flu, or norovirus than to be exposed to COVID-19. Many of the precautions that help prevent colds, flu, and norovirus can help protect against other respiratory viruses.

### Recommended guidance

As of this writing, it is **extremely unlikely** that anyone with travel to mainland China within the past 14 days would be at school. As of February 3, 2020, travelers from mainland China are arriving into the U.S. at 11 airports (not including Logan airport in Boston) and are being screened upon entry. Travelers who are ill or who have traveled in the high-risk area of Hubei Province are being quarantined at the point of entry. Travelers from other parts of China without symptoms are being told to stay at home for 14 days from day of arrival.

If students, staff, or volunteers do come to the nurse's office with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from China in the last 14 days:

- › Place the individual in a private room, ask them to wear a face mask and close the door.
- › Ask the individual about symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, difficulty breathing). Other symptoms could include: chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. If you are in the same room as the individual, wear a face mask and stand at least six feet away.
- › If the individual requires immediate medical care, call 911 for an ambulance, and inform EMS of the individual's recent travel to China.
- › Call the RIDOH Center for Acute Infectious Disease Epidemiology (CAIDE) at 401-222-2577 (401-276-8046 after hours) for additional guidance.

### The precautions to help prevent colds and the flu can help protect against COVID-19.

RIDOH recommends that schools continue education about good hygiene. Students, staff, and volunteers should be reminded to:

- › Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If unable to wash, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers
- › Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- › Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve (not with your hands)
- › Stay away from people who are sick and stay home when you are sick

#### **Schools should follow their regular cleaning and disinfection program.**

- › Clean hard surfaces (desks, tables, countertops, sinks). Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (door handles, faucets, railings), bathrooms and health rooms. Use alcohol wipes to clean keyboards.
- › Use “EPA-approved” disinfectant to clean high-touch surfaces and patient care areas.
- › Clean the surface first to remove all organic matter. Thorough cleaning with soap and water will remove most microorganisms.
- › Custodial staff is trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills.

#### **For more information**

- › RIDOH has created a website updated constantly with the latest CDC guidance and resources. Visit [health.ri.gov/covid](http://health.ri.gov/covid).
- › Rhode Island Department of Health: COVID-19 Fact Sheets available in six languages: [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [French](#), [Haitian Creole](#), and [Portuguese](#)
- › CDC: [Share the Facts, Stop Fear](#)
- › CDC: [Frequently Asked Questions and Answers: Coronavirus Disease-2019 \(COVID-19\) and Children](#)
- › [CDC Communication Resources](#)
- › RIDOH: [Novel Coronavirus Update for School Nurses](#)
- › [Novel Coronavirus Update for School Nurse Teachers and Administrators](#)
- › Novel Coronavirus Updates: [Novel Coronavirus Update No. 1](#), [Novel Coronavirus Update No. 2](#), [Novel Coronavirus Update No. 3](#)
- › Rhode Island Department of Health: [Coronavirus Preparedness and Coordination On-Going in Rhode Island](#) (February 20, 2020 press release)
- › CDC: [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\), February 2020](#)
- › Occupational Safety and Health Administration: [Interim guidance to prevent worker exposure to COVID-19](#)
- › Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress: [Taking Care of Your Family During Coronavirus and Other Emerging Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- › Rhode Island Department of Health: [Viruses Don't Discriminate. Neither Should We.](#) (Poster)
- › Rhode Island Department of Health: [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) (web page, also available in [Spanish](#))
- › Rhode Island Department of Health: [RIDOH Monitoring Novel Coronavirus Situation](#) (January 28, 2020 press release)
- › CDC: [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) (web page)
- › World Health Organization: [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) (web page)

Thank you for your help to keep Rhode Island students and school personnel healthy and safe.

*Please contact the RIDOH Center for Acute Infectious Disease Epidemiology at 401-222-2577 Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. or 401-276-8046 after hours with any other questions. Please contact RIDOH Infectious Disease Communications Coordinator Aaron Frechette ([aaron.frechette@health.ri.gov](mailto:aaron.frechette@health.ri.gov)) or 401-222-7624 for assistance with any educational materials and communication resources.*

Rhode Island healthcare providers

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