



COVID-19

Getting your school, college or educational setting ready

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In January 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated there is a high risk of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreading to other countries around the world.

WHO and public health authorities around the world are taking action to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, long term success cannot be taken for granted. All sections of our society – including employers, schools, colleges and other educational settings, must play a role if we are to stop the spread of this disease.

How COVID-19 spreads

When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales, they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables or telephones. People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. If they are standing within one meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu.

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your educational setting

The low-cost measures below will help prevent the spread of infections, such as colds, flu and stomach bugs, in your workplace and protect your students and employees.

Schools, colleges and other educational settings should start doing these things now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in the communities where they operate. They can already slow the spread of COVID-19 if it arrives at one of your schools, colleges or educational settings.

Make sure your school, college or educational setting is clean and hygienic

- Surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. keyboards, mouse and other frequently touched objects) need to be wiped with disinfectant regularly. Why? Because contamination on surfaces touched by staff or students is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads.
- Promote [regular and thorough hand-washing](#) by staff and students
 - Put sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the school, college or educational setting. Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled
 - Display [posters promoting hand-washing](#)
 - Combine this with other communication measures such as offering guidance at meetings and information on the intranet or internal messaging systems to promote hand-washing
 - Make sure that staff and students have access to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water
 - Why? Because washing kills the virus on your hands and prevents the spread of COVID -19
- Promote good respiratory hygiene in the school, college or educational setting. Display posters promoting respiratory hygiene. Combine this with other appropriate communication measures to staff and students and briefing during classes, lectures, meetings and information on the intranet etc.
 - Ensure that paper tissues are available for those who develop a runny nose or cough at work, along with closed bins for hygienically disposing of them.
 - Why? Because good respiratory hygiene prevents the spread of COVID-19
- Advise staff and parents/students to consult [national travel advice](#) before going abroad
- Brief your staff, parents and students that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community, the following advice should be followed:
 - Anyone with even mild symptoms e.g. cough, fever, respiratory symptoms should

stay home (or work from home if that is possible) or if they have had to take simple medications, such as paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin, which may mask symptoms of infection.

- Keep communicating and promoting the message that students and staff need to stay at home even if they have just mild symptoms of COVID-19.
- Display posters with this message in your school, college or educational setting. Combine this with the communication channels commonly used in your setting.
- Make sure to promote national COVID-19 response campaign materials to promote this message.
- Make clear to staff that they will be able to count this time off as sick leave.

Things to consider when your employees and your students travel (e.g. a school group)

Before travelling

- Make sure your organisation and its employees have the latest information on areas where COVID-19 is spreading.
- Based on the latest information, your organisation should assess the benefits and risks related to upcoming travel plans.
- Avoid sending staff and students who may be at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease) to areas where COVID-19 is spreading.
- Make sure all persons travelling to locations reporting COVID-19 are briefed by a qualified professional (e.g. staff health services, health care provider or local public health partner)
- Consider issuing employees who are about to travel with small bottles (under 100 CL) of alcohol-based hand rub. This can facilitate regular hand-washing.

While travelling

- Encourage staff and students to wash their hands regularly and stay at least one metre away from people who are coughing or sneezing

- Ensure staff and students know what to do and who to contact if they feel ill while travelling.
- Ensure that your staff and students comply with instructions from local authorities where they are travelling. If, for example, they are told by local authorities not to go somewhere they should comply with this. Your travel plans should comply with any local restrictions on travel, movement or large gatherings.

When you or your employees return from travelling

Staff and students who have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading should monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days.

If they develop even mild symptoms of cough, fever or breathing difficulties they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (one metre or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also telephone their GP giving details of their recent travel and symptoms. They should not attend the GP in person, but phone ahead.

Getting your school, college or educational setting ready in case COVID-19 arrives in your community

1. Develop a plan of what to do if someone becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at one of your workplaces.
 - a. The plan should cover putting the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others in the workplace, limiting the number of people who have contact with the sick person and contacting the local health authorities. See Guidance for staff available on HPSC
2. Consider how to identify persons who may be at risk, and support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination into your workplace. This could include persons who have recently travelled to an area reporting cases, or other personnel who have conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. diabetes, heart and lung disease, older age).
3. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community the health authorities may advise people to avoid public transport and crowded places.
4. Develop a contingency and continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities where your

school, college or educational facility operates

- a. The plan will help prepare your organisation for the possibility of an outbreak of COVID-19 in its workplaces or community. It may also be valid for other health emergencies
 - a. The plan should address how to keep your school, college or educational facility running even if a significant number of staff and students cannot come to your school, college or educational facility either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill.
 - b. Consider online learning resources for students and staff and how learning could continue within your school, college or educational facility.
 - c. Communicate to your staff, students and parents about the plan and make sure they are aware of what they need to do – or not do – under the plan. Emphasise key points such as the importance of staying away from school, college or educational facility even if they have only mild symptoms or have had to take simple medications (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) which may mask the symptoms.
5. Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 in the school, college or educational facility and offer information and support.

Consult the Department of Education in advance for support and advice

Remember

Now is the time to prepare for COVID-19. Simple precautions and planning can make a big difference. Action now will help protect your students and your employees.

How to stay informed

Find the latest information on where COVID-19 is spreading:

[HSE](#)

[DOH](#)

[DFAT](#)

[WHO](#)

[ECDC](#)