



# Arkansas Department of Health

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4815 West Markham Street • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205-3867 • Telephone (501) 661-2000  
Governor Asa Hutchinson  
Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health

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## Guidance for Schools and Childcare Programs regarding COVID-19

The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) is providing the following guidance in an effort to help schools prepare in light of the spreading epidemic of Novel Coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19). Though the current risk to Arkansans is low, the fact of international travel from areas affected by the epidemic requires that administrators be prepared for (1) how to answer questions regarding students or staff who may have traveled to countries where community spread of the virus is occurring and (2) begin making plans for what schools will do to help maintain continuity of teaching and learning if there is community spread of COVID-19 in Arkansas in the future.

### Background on COVID-19

The virus that causes COVID-19 is transmitted from person-to-person between people in close contact with one another (about 6 ft) through respiratory droplets, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can then land in the mouths or noses of those nearby and be inhaled into the lungs. This transmission is much like other respiratory viruses, such as influenza. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The illness caused by this virus can range from mild to severe, and the most common symptoms are typically fever, cough and shortness of breath. For more information regarding this virus, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

### Guidance about Students and Staff Who Have Traveled or Possibly Been Exposed to COVID-19

At present ADH are monitoring travelers who have **returned within the last 14 days from countries with sustained community transmission**. At present these are the affected countries: **China, South Korea, Italy, Iran, and Japan**. As the epidemic spreads, we will likely also monitor travelers from other affected countries. Travelers from affected countries are advised to stay at home and monitor for symptoms until 14 days have passed from their departure from that country, while limiting interaction with others. Once 14 days have passed without any symptoms of illness, CDC recommends these travelers be allowed to return to school and public activities.

- It is recommended that schools communicate with parents to let them know that the district is aware of the risk of COVID-19 internationally, the district is working with ADH to identify students and staff who may have traveled from the affected countries, and district staff will collaborate with ADH if any such students or staff are identified.

- Districts are requested to identify any student or staff who may have departed China (or, in the future, any other affected country) within the last 14 days. This information is permitted to be shared with ADH under the public emergency rule. The following information can be printed and given: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/THAN-english.pdf> .
- Schools should inform their school nurse if any students or staff have traveled to these countries so that the nurse can advise regarding home self-quarantine and assist with self-monitoring.
- Please report this information to ADH at 501-537-8969.
- If a student is identified as having traveled from China (or other affected country) in the last 14 days **and** has symptoms (fever, cough, and shortness of breath), they should immediately be placed in a single room and have a mask placed on them. Others in the room should wear a mask. If physical contact is required, then gown, gloves and mask should be worn.
- **Any suspected case (with symptoms) of COVID-19 should be reported to ADH immediately at 501-537-8969 (M-F 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM) or 1-800-554-5738 (after hours and weekends).**

### **Guidance for Schools on Preparing for Possibility of Community Outbreaks of COVID-19**

The CDC has said, “As this global outbreak evolves, US communities, including schools, are encouraged to prepare for the possibility of community level outbreaks in the United States.” Therefore, we recommend school districts prepare to implement the following steps if community spread occurs in Arkansas:

- Actively encourage sick students and staff to stay home and develop flexible sick leave policies, including for those caring for sick family members.
- Implement school absenteeism monitoring systems to track student and staff absences and determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.
- Establish procedures for quickly separating sick students and staff from those who are well and for sending the sick home as soon as possible.
- To help reduce the possibility of further transmission of COVID-19 within schools and within the larger community, consider temporary dismissals of 14 days *if* a student or staff member attended school prior to being *confirmed* to have COVID-19 infection. The duration, geographic scope and public health objective of school dismissals may be reassessed and changed as the local outbreak situation evolves.

More detailed advice from CDC regarding this planning can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html> .

We urge you to review this website carefully as it will answer many of your questions.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer A. Dillaha, M.D.*

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Medical Director for Immunizations and Outbreak Response