

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals
FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed. D. 
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance for Vermont Schools
DATE: February 28, 2020

The Vermont Department of Health is closely monitoring the rapid developments in the outbreak of respiratory illness called COVID-19 that is caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. Vermont is prepared to respond to protect and support Vermonters.

There are no cases of people with COVID-19 in Vermont as of February 28, 2020. Should the situation in Vermont change, the Vermont Department of Health and the Agency of Education will coordinate to alert every SD/SU and its schools about specific preparedness and response guidelines to follow.

It is important to note that at this point, Vermont residents are much more likely to become sick with a cold or the flu than to be exposed to COVID-19. [Many of the precautions that help prevent other respiratory diseases, like colds and the flu, can also help keep an illness like COVID-19 from spreading:](#)

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

The Vermont Department of Health and the Vermont Agency of Education will contact you as the situation develops with any guidance or directives that will affect your schools. Please be aware that the Vermont Department of Health is leading the response to COVID-19. The Vermont Agency of Education will be assisting with disseminating information and guidance specific to schools.

If parents contact you with concerns about COVID-19, please direct them to the [Vermont Department of Health's COVID-19 website](#) or tell them to dial 2-1-1 for more information. As always, parents should be encouraged to keep their children home when they are sick.

We know that there have been media reports on the prospect of widespread school closures in the United States. At this time, those measures are not necessary in Vermont. We are working with the Vermont Department of Health on guidance in the event that this changes.

We understand that managing uncertainty is challenging and thank you for your partnership in responding promptly and appropriately to a continually evolving situation.

Additional Guidance

Information for Families on Academic and Vacation Travel

Students and staff planning or returning from travel should consult the CDC's [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel website](#). It lists geographic areas with widespread or sustained community transmission and compiles the CDC's official COVID-19 warnings and alerts related to nonessential travel. The Frequently Asked Questions and Answers sections on [Canceling or Postponing Travel](#), [Air or Cruise Travel](#) and [Returning from Travel](#) may be particularly informative.

Responding to a Potential COVID-19 Case

If a student, staff member or volunteer comes to the nurse's office with a fever, cough or difficulty breathing and traveled to one of the affected locations (as of 2/28: [China](#), [Iran](#), [Italy](#), [Japan](#) or [South Korea](#)) in the 14 days before symptom onset or had recent close contact with someone under investigation by public health authorities for COVID-19:

- 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 6 feet away.
- If the individual requires *immediate* medical care, call 9-1-1 for an ambulance and inform EMS of the individual's recent travel.
- Call the Vermont Department of Health at (802) 863-7240 (24/7)

School Cleaning and Disinfection

Schools should follow their routine cleaning and disinfection procedure.

- 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.

Who to Contact for Additional Information

The Vermont Department of Health COVID-19 website (healthvermont.gov/covid19) is an up-to-the-minute source of information on the response to COVID-19 in Vermont and should be your first stop to stay informed on immediate news and guidance.

Your School Nurse

School nurses have received guidance from the Vermont Department of Health on identifying and responding to potential cases of COVID-19 and can advise on general practices to prevent the spread of respiratory infections at school.

Your school nurse can contact [Sharonlee Trefry](#), the State School Nurse Consultant at the Vermont Department of Health, with questions about the role of school nurses in Vermont's COVID-19 response.

Vermont Department of Health

General questions about COVID-19 can be addressed by calling 2-1-1. Any suspect cases of COVID-19 should be reported to the Vermont Department of Health immediately by calling (802) 863-7240 (24/7).

If you have a unique concern or scenario unfolding in your district, contact [Patsy Kelso](#), State Epidemiologist for the Vermont Department of Health for guidance.

Vermont Agency of Education

The Vermont Agency of Education will assist the Vermont Department of Health in coordinating any communication or guidance specific to Vermont schools. If you are unsure who to contact with your question or concern, we are happy to help connect you with the right resource. Contact [Kate Connizzo](#) for assistance.

Additional Resources

[Vermont Department of Health COVID-19 Website](#)

[What You Need to Know about Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) (CDC)

[COVID-19 "Stop the Spread of Germs" Poster](#) (CDC)

[Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#) (CDC)