



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for NYC Schools and Families

### **Know the Facts**

See the answers below to common questions about the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to get accurate information and help guard against stigma and fear. There is a lot of information circulating about coronavirus on social media and even in some news reporting that is not based in the facts. Stay informed and obtain information from trusted sources like the NYC Health Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

To learn the most up-to-date information, visit:

- [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus) or call 311 (interpretation and translation services are available)
- [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus) or call the CDC Health Line at 1-800-232-4636.

### **Background**

- 1. What are novel coronaviruses?** Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that are common throughout the world. They cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses like pneumonia. A novel (new) coronavirus is a type of coronavirus that has not been previously seen in humans.
- 2. What is coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?** The 2019 novel coronavirus causes a respiratory disease called COVID-19. Infections with this new virus have been reported in many areas, including the United States and New York City. Visit the CDC website for a list of affected areas [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers)
- 3. How serious is COVID-19? What are the symptoms?** Reported illnesses due to COVID-19 have ranged from mild to severe. Symptoms can include fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Most people with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms. People who are at most risk for severe illness are elderly or have other health conditions.
- 4. How does this virus spread?** Much is still unknown about how this novel coronavirus spreads. Person-to-person spread is occurring. Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how the flu and other respiratory illnesses spread.
- 5. How many days does it take to get sick from the virus after exposure?** The CDC believes that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear between two and 14 days after exposure. This period is called the incubation period.
- 6. What is the best way to prevent COVID-19?**
  - Stay home when you are sick.
  - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  - Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, not with your hands. Put the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash your hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or disinfecting wipes.

#### **7. What can international travelers do to protect themselves?**

- Avoid nonessential travel to affected areas. Visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers) for the latest travel health notices.
- If you were recently in an affected area with ongoing transmission, see question #10.
- If you were recently outside of the U.S. and have a fever, cough and/or shortness of breath, contact your doctor.
- If your doctor asks you to stay home:
  - Avoid going out in public, to school, or to work until you have been fever-free for at least 72 hours without the use of fever reducing drugs like Tylenol or ibuprofen.
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve, not with your hands.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
  - Visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.nyc.gov/coronavirus) for additional guidance under “Returning Travelers”

#### **Guidance for schools:**

#### **8. What steps can a school take to prevent respiratory viruses from infecting students and teachers?** The NYC Health Department recommends schools consider the following to prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory viruses:

- Instruct staff and students to
  - Encourage families to keep students who are sick at home.
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, people should use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
  - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  - Cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their sleeve, not their hands.
  - Have custodial staff clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces according to product directions and their facility’s policy.
  - Avoid shaking hands. Instead, use a fist bump, slight bow or elbow bump.
  - Use only your knuckle to touch light switches, elevator buttons, or other frequently touched objects
  - Open doors with a closed fist or hip. Do not grasp the handle with a hand, unless there is no other way to open the door.
- Strongly promote the annual flu shot for all students and staff. It is not too late to get the flu shot.
- Adhere to existing school health protocols for any staff/student(s) presenting as ill or any staff/student(s) who may have been exposed to a contagious disease. Follow established exclusion recommendations for acute respiratory illness. (For COVID-19 symptoms, people should have no fever for at least 72 hours without fever-reducing medications before returning to school.)

- Provide adequate soap, paper towels, and other cleaning supplies in bathrooms and other wash areas.

**9. What can schools do to plan ahead?** Visit the CDC website for guidance on what to consider when preparing for the possibility of ongoing transmission of COVID-19 in NYC. [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html)

**10. What should a school do if a student, teacher, or staff member becomes sick with fever, cough, or shortness of breath?**

Students: If a student becomes ill during the school day, the student should go to the school nurse and inform the nurse of their travel history (if any) and symptoms. School nurses have protocols in place to work with the NYC Health Department to assess these students. If there is no school nurse, the student should be separated from other students and staff until they can be picked up to go home or to a health care provider. Consider having the student wear a surgical face mask while on school premises and awaiting transportation home or to a health care provider. The NYC Health Department will make further recommendations once the student is in medical care.

Staff: The person should seek evaluation by a health care provider and should not remain in the school. Before visiting a health care provider or an emergency room (if very sick), the person should call ahead and describe their symptoms and recent travel. Consider having the staff member wear a surgical mask while on school premises and awaiting transportation home or to a health care provider. The NYC Health Department will make further recommendations once the staff member is in medical care and has been evaluated.

**11. Should planned field trips or school-sponsored travel to COVID-19 affected areas be cancelled? What is the updated international travel trip policy for schools?** There is no restriction for local field trips; all should proceed as planned. Based on the CDC travel guidelines for international travel, and in consultation with the NYC Health Department, the DOE is issuing updated guidance on international travel. Currently, the CDC recommends that travelers avoid or consider postponing all nonessential travel to the areas that have a level 2 or higher advisory alert. Visit the CDC webpage for the most up to date list: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers). Accordingly, all DOE-sponsored international trips to these countries must be cancelled for the rest of this school year.

Schools should work with travel vendors regarding securing reimbursement of trip fees. In instances in which vendors will neither reimburse nor credit the school for future trips, superintendents should escalate to their BCO Directors. Note that the DOE is limited in its ability to secure funds, particularly in instances where trips were not booked with the DOE-contracted vendors.

**12. Should students returning from affected areas with cold or flu-like symptoms be tested for COVID-19 infection?** No. If students have no symptoms and are not ill, there is no reason to be tested. If any student develops fever, cough or trouble breathing, parents should call their health care provider and let them know about recent travel history. Their provider will make a determination about what type of testing is warranted.

For the most current list of affected areas with ongoing spread of coronavirus, visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers)

**13. What happens when people who have been in affected areas with ongoing transmission return to the United States?** Travelers returning to the U.S. from China, South Korea, Japan, Italy or Iran (all are [areas with ongoing spread of coronavirus](#) as identified by the CDC) should stay home for 14 days from the time they left the affected country and monitor their health and avoid contact with others. If returning

travelers from affected countries develop fever, cough or trouble breathing, they should call their health care provider and tell them about their symptoms and recent travel. Visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus) for additional guidance under “Returning Travelers”.

These recommendations apply to any travelers returning after March 5, 2020, and for travel from China since February 3, 2020.

People who have been in Hubei Province, China, or are sick, are not allowed to continue to their final destinations and will be quarantined for 14 days since last date in Hubei Province. Those who are sick are referred to medical facilities.

- 14. What about families of people who have been in affected areas with ongoing transmission but who themselves have not traveled?** Anyone, including family members, who were not in areas with ongoing spread of coronavirus and are not sick should continue to stay in school or go to work.
- 15. What do schools do if a student who spent time in an area with ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 comes to school during their 14-day self-monitoring period when they are supposed to stay home?** Some families may not fully understand the instructions they receive at the airport and from the NYC Health Department. If a principal is aware that a student was asked to self-monitor and stay home from school, that principal may remind the parents of the student of the guidance and ask them to keep the student home until 14 days after they left the affected area. Principals and school staff should be sensitive in their conversations with these families. Principals should reach out to their Health Director or the Office of School Health for further support if needed.
- 16. Can schools exclude students with recent travel from an area with ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and no illness?** No. Although these students are asked to self-monitor and stay at home for 14 days after they left the affected area, their families are not given a legal order to do so. As mentioned above, if a student who should be staying home during their self-monitoring period comes to school, and the principal is aware that the student was asked to self-monitor and stay home from school, principals can remind the parents of these students of the guidance. Principals should also call their Health Directors or the Office of School Health for support if needed.
- 17. Will schools be given a list of students who returned from an area with ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and should not come to school?** No. Returning travelers’ names and information will not be released to schools. It is up to the returning family to inform the school of a student’s need to stay home.
- 18. Should students who have received guidance from the NYC Health Department to stay home after returning from an affected area be given an excused absence from school?** Yes. If you need a doctor’s note to excuse a student from school, you can find one on the NYC Health Department’s webpage: [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus)
- 19. How can schools support students who need to stay home during their self-monitoring period?** Schools should make every effort to help these students keep up with their schoolwork by informing all the students’ teachers and encouraging teachers to provide assignments and study material electronically or otherwise so that the student may study from home. The NYC Health Department has Frequently Asked Questions regarding home self-monitoring on their webpage: [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus)
- 20. Do people who have been to an area with ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 need to get cleared to return to work or school?** People with a travel history to an area with ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 who have no symptoms of COVID-19 can return to school or work after their 14-day self-monitoring period is complete. There is no clearance process, nor is a doctor’s note necessary

to return to school. If you need a doctor's note to excuse a student's absence from school, you can find one on the NYC Health Department's webpage: [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.nyc.gov/coronavirus).

- 21. Are there any restrictions on returning travelers from other COVID-10 affected areas?** The federal government has expanded restrictions to travelers returning from China, Iran, Italy, or South Korea. Out of an abundance of caution, the City is adding Japan to this list as well. This list may change. Visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.nyc.gov/coronavirus) for updates.
- 22. What can schools do at this time to decrease stigma and discrimination?** Stay informed, listen to public health messages, and implement good public health practices to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. Avoid stigmatizing people who have recently traveled from affected areas or whose families may originate from affected areas. It is important to separate facts from fear and guard against stigma. There is a lot of information circulating about coronavirus on social media and in some news reporting that is not based in the facts. Stay informed and obtain information from trusted sources like the NYC Health Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Contact your Health Director or the Office of School Health if you have questions about exclusion of students or staff who have traveled or their family members, or if someone self-reports travel or illness.
- 23. If I witness or am a victim of NYC-school-based harassment, intimidation, discrimination, or bullying behavior based on actual or perceived race and nation of origin, what should I do?** Parents, guardians, and students can report concerns regarding school-based harassment, intimidation, discrimination, and/or bullying behavior by completing one of the following steps below:
- For complaints about staff,
    - File complaints electronically by using the complaint form available at <https://www.nycenet.edu/oeo> or by contacting DOE's Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management at 718-935-3320.
  - For complaints about students, do one of the following:
    - Notify the school's principal, Respect for All (RFA) liaison(s), or any other school employee.
    - File a report via the online portal: <https://www.nycenet.edu/bullyingreporting>.
    - Email the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD) at [RespectforAll@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:RespectforAll@schools.nyc.gov).
  - Families can also visit <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/support/get-help> for guidance about how to reach out to the appropriate people in their school or district for assistance.
- 24. What resources are available at NYC public schools?** It is important that each school community is meaningfully engaged in creating a school culture and climate in which all students and staff feel safe and respected. To assist the school community in addressing bullying and bias-based behavior, the NYCDOE Respect for All (RFA) Library (<https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/policies-for-all/respect-for-all>) offers resources for parents, guardians, students, school staff, and school leaders, including:
- Respect for diversity lessons
  - Initiatives to proactively engage students in promoting respect, such as "Bully Prevention Month" and "No Name-Calling Week"
  - Projects like "Not in Our School" and "No Place for Hate"

Schools may also use these Grades K-12 resources, printable materials, and lesson plans regarding handwashing and fostering empathy and countering biased responses regarding the coronavirus.

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- [Teaching Children about the Flu and Prevention](#)
- [Health and Handwashing Promotion Materials](#)
- [Handwashing Lesson Plans and Materials](#)
  
- Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility\*:
  - Lesson plans to foster empathy regarding the Coronavirus:
    - [Fostering Empathy in an Interconnected World](#)
    - [What We Don't Know Frightens Us: The Coronavirus & Scapegoating](#)
  - [Guidance on countering biased responses to the Coronavirus in schools](#)

People who witness or face harassment, intimidation, discrimination, and/or bullying based on actual or perceived race and nation of origin or other identities can report incidents to the NYC Commission on Human Rights by calling 311 or 718-722-3131.

*\*Note that these resources are provided for informational purposes and to support your work. The DOE is not responsible for the content of non-DOE resources nor does it endorse such content. Any recommended practices contained in these resources must be implemented in a manner consistent with DOE policies, practices and procedures.*

**For more information, check the NYC Health Department website frequently: [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus)**