Public Health
Idaho North Central District

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and Higher Education Facilities Information for Administrators and Employees

Background

Many parts across the world are experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus. This virus can spread from person-to-person and the number of cases detected in the United States and many other countries is growing.

Currently, the immediate risk to the general public in Idaho and the United States is evolving rapidly. Planning for an increase in the community and to mitigate the impact on students and staff, use the CDC's Pandemic Preparedness Checklist for Colleges and Universities. It is also important that you rely on local and state information regarding the current status of the virus in Idaho.

As new information emerges, please remind your community that *the risk of novel coronavirus is not at all connected with race, ethnicity or nationality*. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin, and be sure to maintain confidentiality of people with confirmed coronavirus infection. Sharing accurate information during a time of heightened concern is one of the best things we can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading. The CDC website is an excellent source of information.

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Some coronaviruses have caused more severe illness, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). SARS-CoV-2 is a new coronavirus that was not identified in humans before December 2019.

What are common symptoms of COVID-19 illness?

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. It takes 2 to 14 days after a person gets the virus in their body to become ill. Novel coronavirus is new, and we are learning more each day about symptoms it causes and how long it takes for people to become sick.

How does the virus spread?

Most often, it is spread from person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It's currently unclear if 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. Often, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest) but there is some indication of spread by individuals who are not exhibiting typical symptoms.

Who should seek medical evaluation for COVID-19?

Staff, students and subcontracted individuals who are:
- Ill with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from an affected area in the last 14 days
- Ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have been identified by Public Health as a recent close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case or had recent close contact with someone who is being evaluated for COVID-19 infection.
- Ill with a severe lower respiratory tract infection and unknown contact during known community transmission.

What should I do if I suspect a staff member or student is at risk for COVID-19?

If a staff member or student meets the above criteria, it is important to place them in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask. If the student is seen in Student Health Services, ensure that they call the clinic prior to making the appointment. Make sure that the Student Health Center is aware to immediately notify your local health department (LHJ) if they think the student has COVID-19. Your LHJ will provide you with guidance

Should staff or students delay or suspend travel to affected areas?

- Check the CDC's Traveler's Health Notices for the latest guidance and travel recommendations for each country that may be affected. This can be found at on the CDC website.
- Advise staff to check themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Ensure staff who become sick while traveling understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed. Students should contact parents or guardians for healthcare options.
- Encourage employees who travel to receive all recommended vaccinations, including influenza. It's not too late to vaccinate.

> As with any newly emerging infectious disease, knowledge evolves with time.
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> Early on, it is difficult to know the ways in which the disease spreads, how effectively it spreads from person to person, and how severe the infection is. We will continue to update the novel coronavirus website as more information becomes available.

What can I do to prepare for COVID-19 impacts to the College or University? Plan Now!

1. **Planning & Coordination:**
   a. Some of the **key considerations** when making decisions on appropriate responses are:
   - **Disease severity** where the school is located. The intensity of an outbreak may differ according to geographic locations. Local health officials may be issuing guidance specific to their communities. Know the legal authority of community leaders and assign the appropriate staff to work with them.

   - **Impact of disease on staff and students that are vulnerable** and may be at higher risk for adverse health complications. Inform employees that some people may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. Plan to accommodate their work.

   - **Prepare for possible increased numbers of absences** due to illness in staff and their family members, dismissals of early childhood programs and K-12 schools due to high levels of absenteeism or illness:
     - Administrators should plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.
       - o Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the university is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
       - o Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products. Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).

     - Universities/colleges with more than one campus location are encouraged to provide local managers with the authority to take appropriate actions outlined in their infectious disease outbreak response plan based on the condition in each locality and with consultation with health services staff.

2. **Continuity of Learning and Student Support**
   a. Assess alternative learning opportunities including web-based instruction
   b. Plan how to support students in their residences including food service, custodial services, etc.
   c. Develop communication methods for immediate contact with students to ensure they are aware of cancellations or alterations in schedules and events

3. **Infection Control on Campuses**
   a. Actively encourage sick employees and students to stay home and away from others
      i. Develop flexible attendance and sick leave policies. Do not require a healthcare provider's note for staff or students who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness as healthcare providers may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
      ii. Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.
      iii. Work with subcontractors to communicate your infection control policies
   b. Separate employees and students who become ill from others. Send them home immediately.
   c. <u>**Emphasize respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by everyone**</u>
   d. Place posters that encourage <u>staying home when sick</u>, <u>cough and sneeze etiquette</u>, and <u>hand hygiene</u> at throughout campus where they are likely to be seen.
   e. Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by everyone.
   f. Instruct staff and students to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. **Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.**
   g. Advise everyone to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
   h. Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in prominent areas. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations rooms to encourage hand hygiene.

4. **Perform routine environmental cleaning:** (for more information, refer to <u>CDC website</u> for businesses)
   a. Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces, such as workstations, countertops, handrails and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
   b. Clean and maintain sports equipment and facilities on a regular basis
   c. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time. Ensure that adequate supplies are available.
   d. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by staff and students (if indicated) before each use

5. **Communications Planning**
   a. Ensure that communication technologies are well supported and exercised. Build redundancy and contingency plans
   b. Establish public information outlets that are timely and efficient
   c. Work closely with local officials to ensure that the campus authorities are notified of triggers for action or other important events that will affect campus operations
   d. Disseminate communication plans and define authorities for distribution of information

Where can I turn for more information?

- State of Idaho Official Resources for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/
- Public Health – Idaho North Central District http://idahopublichealth.com/district-2/novel-coronavirus
- Centers for Disease Control and Preventionhttps://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/
- Public Health – Idaho North Central District novel coronavirus information line: 1-866-736-6632.