



## **2019 Novel Coronavirus Information (March 5, 2020)**

This informational document includes the following topics pertaining to schools and the coronavirus, COVID-19:

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### **Chronic Absenteeism**

Local education agencies are encouraged to continue to inform parents about the importance of avoiding school absences unless they are necessary. The outbreak of the coronavirus has created alarm among many parents, and it is important that we communicate with them in the most effective way possible to avoid unnecessary absences.

According to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), the health risk to the general public in California from novel coronavirus remains low, but schools can take common sense precautions to prevent the spread of all infectious diseases and communicate to parents about precautions that schools are taking.

Any absences due to illness or quarantine should be excused, and students should be allowed to complete all assignments and tests missed during excused absences that can be reasonably provided.

A helpful toolkit to use during this time of year to promote school attendance is available from Attendance Works at their Winter Messaging Toolkit web page at <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/messaging/stay-the-course-a-winter-messaging-toolkit/>.

## **Distance Learning/Independent Study**

Online instruction/distance learning is a useful instructional methodology that can be assigned through an independent study program. Districts and county offices of education are not required to provide independent study. Independent study can be used on a short-term or long-term basis, and on a full-time basis or in conjunction with courses taken in a classroom setting.

Independent study is provided as an alternative instructional strategy, not an alternative curriculum. Independent study students work independently, according to a written agreement and under the general supervision of a credentialed teacher or teachers.

CDE's long-standing guidance regarding generating attendance is rooted in statutory attendance accounting requirements. Attendance that is not under the immediate supervision and control of a certificated employee of the LEA has to follow the independent study rules in order to generate ADA for apportionment.

Independent study has a number of apportionment significant requirements. To the extent a student is participating in online/distance learning instruction through an independent study program, and all apportionment significant independent study requirements are met, that student can generate ADA for funding purposes.

NOTE: One especially important apportionment-significant requirement to note is the requirement that independent study be voluntary. If school is closed, students cannot generate attendance through independent study while school is closed. If students are excluded from attending school, they cannot generate attendance through independent study while they are excluded from attending school.

Read more at the Independent Study Program Summary web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eo/is/isprogramssummary.asp>, and the Legal Requirements for Independent Study web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eo/is/legal.asp>.

## **Health Practices & Cleaning**

It is important to note that so much of protecting yourself and your family comes from common sense practices. Practice good hygiene and stay home if there are symptoms. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends the following steps to prevent the spread of all respiratory viruses:

- Washing hands with soap and water.
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick are all ways to reduce the risk of infection with a number of different viruses.
- Keeping children home from school if they become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever and cough.

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School resources to promote healthy habits for young students can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html>.

## **Messaging from California Department of Public Health**

- As in any public health event, the California Department of Public Health's Medical and Health Coordination Center has been activated and is coordinating response efforts across the state and preparing for possible community transmission.
- California continues to prepare and respond in coordination with federal and local partners, hospitals, and physicians.
- California has activated the State Operations Center to coordinate response efforts across the state.
- Governor Gavin Newsom requested the Legislature make funds available for state government to respond to the spread of COVID-19.
- The CDPH is providing information, guidance documents, and technical support to local health departments, health care facilities, providers, schools, universities, colleges, and child care facilities across California.
- This is an evolving situation that we are actively monitoring so we are prepared should the situation change. For more information please visit the California Department of Public Health's web site at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/>.

## **Planning for a Pandemic**

Every local educational agency (LEA) in California is required (EC 32280-32289) to have a comprehensive school safety plan. The safety plan should provide guidance for school administration, staff, and students for any emergency that impacts the school, including a public health crisis such as a pandemic.

Please remember that many pandemics have been experienced by schools and workplaces over the years. Procedures and protocols to combat a pandemic have been well-established and have proven to be quite effective. The coronavirus (COVID-19) situation is no different.

Stay calm and educate yourself about COVID-19. Every LEA should have a relationship with their respective county public health department. The county health department traditionally takes the lead on guidance and directives during a pandemic incident.

For more information, see the CDE's Pandemic Resources web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/fluresources.asp> as well as the CDE's Coronavirus web page <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/coronavirus.asp> which features a helpful pandemic checklist.

## Scenario Planning / How to Address Fear

It is understandable that school communities may panic at the thought of COVID-19 appearing in schools, but there is already a lot of information that can help educational agencies plan for various scenarios and alleviate fear.

The CDC has a full list of guidelines for schools

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

intended to help administrators of public and private child care programs and K–12 schools prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students and staff. CDC information on COVID-19 and children says that there is no evidence that children are more susceptible. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>.

In light of the State of Emergency declared on March 4, 2020, by the Governor, we would like to reiterate to school communities that this was a preparation-based declaration, not because an outbreak currently exists. An emergency proclamation is designed to help focus resources and get a government response moving more quickly. Unfortunately, emergency declarations happen a number of times every year, especially during wildfire season, and pertain to only those directly involved with the emergency situation.

Schools should develop tentative plans for how school closures may work. School plans should be designed to minimize disruption to teaching and learning and protect students and staff from social stigma and discrimination. Plans can build on everyday practices (e.g., encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely) that include strategies for before, during, and after a possible outbreak.

As previously mentioned, CDE has provided guidance to our schools and districts throughout the state, to encourage them to identify plans and protocols in preparation for the possibility of school closures, and for communicating with families, due to a public health concern.

Regular communication is a great tool to prevent misconception and fear. Providing staff, parents, and students with as much information as possible will help misinformation and fear from taking hold. Educational agencies must also keep in mind privacy restrictions and the importance of confidentiality when sharing details on those who have any disease.

Again, deciding to close a school is a local decision, and one that CDE would not provide the directive on, especially if it is a public health concern. In the case of COVID-19, the decision to close a school would either come from the school and/or district, or ideally from their local county public health officials.

## School Closures and Funding

School closure decisions should be approached cautiously. Student and staff safety are the priority.

LEAs that close schools or remain open but have a material decrease in attendance due to an epidemic or pandemic are eligible to seek emergency average daily attendance (ADA) credit through the CDE Form J-13A waiver process.

California law authorizes the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) to provide credit for instructional time in the case of a schoolwide closure based on a declaration of an epidemic made by a local public health officer. However, closing a school simply as a precaution may result in a LEA not qualifying for a J-13A waiver and a penalty for failure to offer the statutorily required instructional days and/or minutes.

In the case of a Governor's declaration of emergency unaccompanied by a pandemic, a letter from the local public health officer is still needed to substantiate a closure and not needed to substantiate a material decrease as long as the LEA can substantiate each absence being caused by illness due to coronavirus or coronavirus symptoms as we did with H1N1. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/pandemicflufaq.asp>.

Information regarding material decrease in attendance and school closure can be found at CDE's Form J-13A web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/aa/pa/j13a.asp>.

## **Sending Students Home: Continuity of Teaching and Learning**

In case of an outbreak, LEAs are strongly urged to consider the effects of significant absences on student achievement and establish plans in advance that not only ensure health and safety, but also maintain a continuity of learning.

Consider the following and plan accordingly:

- Are distribution plans in place to ensure student access to resources in the event of sudden absences or school dismissal?
- Are contact information records for students, parents, guardians, and all staff (e-mail addresses, physical addresses, phone numbers, including mobile, etc.) on file, and do teachers have access to that information to check in with absent students regarding academic progress?
- Are policies regarding privacy and sharing of personal information in place and clear to all parties?
- How can schools and districts leverage distance learning resources from other sources, including current vendors, community colleges and universities, and online sources of open content?
- Are policies in place for awarding credit for courses in the event of sustained distance learning (e.g., credit without seat time, etc.)
- Are defined staffing plans in place to support distance learning in the event of small or large student or faculty absences?

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- Will staff be permitted to return to school to use school-based equipment and resources?
- Are adequate resources or agreements in place to support copying and distributing learning packets and materials for students to use at home for up to 12 weeks if necessary?

More information can be found in this guidance document from the U.S. Department of Education.

[https://rem.s.ed.gov/Docs/DoE\\_Recommendations\\_to\\_Ensure\\_Continuity\\_Teaching\\_and\\_Learning.pdf](https://rem.s.ed.gov/Docs/DoE_Recommendations_to_Ensure_Continuity_Teaching_and_Learning.pdf).

## Testing

The CDE Assessment Development and Administration Division has protocols in place should schools close just before or during CAASPP and ELPAC testing. These protocols have been used when natural disasters or emergencies have occurred. The CDE will work directly with LEAs, schools, and the US Department of Education to facilitate next steps on a case-by-case basis. If a school or district expects or experiences a school closure that significantly undermines test administration, the LEA coordinator should notify the CAASPP Office by phone at 916-445-8765 or by email at [caaspp@cde.ca.gov](mailto:caaspp@cde.ca.gov).

## More Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Coronavirus Disease 2019, COVID-19)

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

California Department of Public Health Immunization Branch (Coronavirus Disease 2019, COVID-19)

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx>

California Department of Public Health (2019 Novel Coronavirus Guidance for Schools and School Districts)

[https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Immunization/Coronavirus%20K-12%20Schools%20Guidance%202\\_7\\_20%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Immunization/Coronavirus%20K-12%20Schools%20Guidance%202_7_20%20FINAL.pdf)