

March 10, 2020

RE: Guidance for Administrators and Helping Children understand the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

Dear Teachers,

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) virus, and we are learning more about it every day. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping transmission (spread) of the virus through every day practices is the best way to keep people healthy.

This interim guidance is intended to help administrators of public and private childcare programs and K-12 schools prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students and staff. Health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 into US communities. Schools can play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, schools can take steps to disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. Schools can prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their students and staff should local health officials identify such a need.

Schools should continue to collaborate, share information, and review plans with local health officials to help protect the whole school community, including those with special health needs. 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 every day practices (e.g., encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely) that include strategies for before, during, and after a possible outbreak.

Review, update and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs). This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners. Focus on the components, or annexes, of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks. Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). Effective strategies build on everyday school policies and practices. Ensure the plan emphasizes common-sense preventive actions for students and staff. For example, emphasize actions such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and washing hands often.

The CDC has workplace resources such as posters with messages for staff about staying home when you are sick and how to avoid spreading germs at work. Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. The CDC offers several free hand washing resources that include health promotion materials, information on proper handwashing techniques, and tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits.

Key resources include guidance on developing high-quality school emergency operations plans, and a companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality school emergency operations plans.

Children and their family members should engage in usual preventive actions to prevent the spread of respiratory infections, including covering coughs, cleaning hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and staying up to date on vaccinations, including influenza. Additional information on prevention measures can be found here (Prevention for 2019 Novel Coronavirus).

Important tips that teachers can share with parents and other caregivers:

- Take care of yourself first. Children depend on the adults around them to be and feel safe and secure. If you are very anxious or angry, children are likely to be more affected by your emotional state than by your words. Find someone you trust to help you address your concerns.
- Watch for unusual behavior that may suggest your child is having difficulty dealing with disturbing events. Stress-related symptoms to be aware of include:
- Depressed or irritable moods sleep disturbances, including increased sleeping, difficulty falling asleep, nightmares or nighttime waking. Changes in appetite, either increased or decreased, social withdrawal, obsessive play, such as repetitively acting out the traumatic event, which interferes with normal activities. Hyperactivity was not previously present.
- Talk about the event with your child. To not talk about it makes the event even more threatening in your child's mind. Silence suggests that what has occurred is too horrible to even speak of. Silence may also imply to your child that you don't think their reactions are important or appropriate. Start by asking what your child has already heard about the events and what understanding he or she has reached. As your child explains, listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns, and then address these.
- Explain -as simply and directly as possible -the events that occurred. The amount of information that will be helpful to a child depends on his or her age. For example, older children generally want and will benefit from more detailed information than younger children. Because every child is different, take cues from your child as to how much information to provide.
- Encourage your child to ask questions, and answer those questions directly. Like adults, children are better able to cope with a crisis if they feel they understand it. Question-and-answer exchanges help to ensure ongoing support as your child begins to understand the crisis and the response to it.
- Limit television viewing of disasters and other crisis events, especially for younger children. Consider coverage on all media, including the internet and social media. When older children watch television, try to watch with them and use the opportunity to discuss what is being seen and how it makes you and your child feel.
- Don't force the issue with your child. Instead, extend multiple invitations for discussion and then provide an increased physical and emotional presence as you wait for him or her to be ready to accept those invitations.
- Recognize that your child may appear disinterested. In the aftermath of a crisis, younger children may not know or understand what has happened or its implications. Older children and adolescents, who are used to turning to their peers for advice, may initially

resist invitations from parents and other caregivers to discuss events and their reactions. Or, they may simply not feel ready to discuss their concerns.

- Reassure children of the steps that are being taken to keep them safe. Disasters and other crises remind us that we are never completely safe from harm. Now more than ever it is important to reassure children that, in reality, they should feel safe in their schools, homes, and communities.
- Consider sharing your feelings about the event or crisis with your child. This is an opportunity for you to role model how to cope and how to plan for the future. Before you reach out, however, be sure that you can express a positive or hopeful plan.
- Help your child to identify concrete actions he or she can take to help those affected by recent events. Rather than focus on what could have been done to prevent a disaster or other crisis, concentrate on what can be done now to help those affected by the event.

If you have concerns about your child's behavior, contact your child's pediatrician, another primary care provider, or a qualified mental health specialist for assistance. In addition to helping parents and other caregivers communicate with their children effectively.

The Web page: www.aap.org/disasters/adjustment includes information, resources, and materials dealing with disasters and providing psychological support for children.

Please check the following CDC website periodically for updated interim guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Continue to watch for updates from us and your county public health officials.