

February 28, 2020

Dear School Administrators and Staff;

RE: Public Health Preparedness Planning and COVID-19

We understand that there is a lot of information circulating about the novel Coronavirus, and the disease it causes now known as COVID-19. Pima County Health Department (PCHD) would like to share the following situational update and some recommendations for schools based on our current assessment of the situation. Understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and information could change. We are also preparing a letter for you to send out to parents with similar information but wanted to provide you, school decision makers, with the most up-to-date information.

What We Know Now

- The virus that causes COVID-19 related disease causes a respiratory illness ranging from a mild cold-like illness to severe pneumonia.
- Most (81%) of people diagnosed with COVID-19 in China had mild disease.
- Similar to influenza, the people who are most likely to have severe disease and complications from COVID-19 are older individuals (>60 years old) and those with other medical conditions like heart and lung disease or diabetes.
- There is no vaccine or treatment currently available for COVID-19.
- As of February 27, 2020, there is ONE confirmed case of community transmission of COVID-19 in the US.

How COVID-19 Spreads

- COVID-19 spreads primarily the same way the common cold or flu spreads – through respiratory droplets produced when someone coughs or sneezes.
- People who are most at risk of infection with COVID-19 are those who have been in close contact (within about 6 feet) with someone who has the disease.
- People are most contagious when they are symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread of the virus might be possible before a person has symptoms, although this is not the main way disease spreads.

What Schools Can Do Now – Prior to Local Spread

- Implement your annual seasonal influenza plan. The actions, plans, and protocols that work best for seasonal or pandemic influenza match very well with those for COVID-19:
 - Students and staff who are ill, especially with acute respiratory symptoms (not allergies or chronic conditions), should stay home.
 - Review sick policies for staff; ensure staff can stay home when ill.
- Ensure prescribed cleaning is happening at school facilities (routine disinfectants are appropriate).
 - Enhance cleaning of high touch surfaces like doorknobs, toilet handles, and sink handles.
 - Ensure that hand sanitizer, soap, paper towels and tissues are widely available in school facilities.

- Take frequent opportunities to remind students to wash their hands often and to cover their coughs/sneezes with a tissue or their elbow. *Feel free to use the hand washing posters attached.*
- Plan for when community spread occurs (non-pharmaceutical interventions or NPIs):
 - Ensure parents/guardians have a plan to designate a caregiver for a sick child(ren) if parents/guardians can't stay home.
 - Look for opportunities to address food insecurity for families who rely on schools for breakfast and/or lunch.
 - Identify at-home learning opportunities during student absences or the unlikely event of a school closure.
 - Identify how the school will communicate updates to parents/guardians.
 - For more information about use of NPIs to respond to pandemics, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/>

PCHD's Position on Closing Schools for COVID-19

- Careful consideration for school closure recommendations will take into account the severity of disease, benefits to public health, impact on student learning, families, childcare, school staff and the economy.
- Because most people with COVID-19 have mild disease, the likelihood that PCHD will recommend closing schools is extremely low, but not zero. PCHD will notify schools prior to recommending closure.
- Closing schools is not always the most effective strategy to slow disease transmission, particularly if children congregate outside of school.
- Schools in Pima County considering closure due to COVID-19 (or other infectious diseases) should work with Public Health before closing. Please contact us if you are considering closing a school.

PCHD staff are working day and night to monitor this evolving situation and will continue to provide new information to the community as things change. If you have questions or are seeing increases in illness and would like to consult with our team, please call our Epidemiology Program at 520-724-7797.

Please follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pimacountyhealthdepartment, Twitter at www.twitter.com/pchd, or see our webpage at www.pima.gov/cov

Sincerely,



Bob England, MD, MPH
Interim Director

Wash Your Hands!

Stop the Spread of Germs



Start with warm or hot water



Use soap and make a lather



20 SEC.
Rub and scrub thoroughly for 20 seconds. Scrub palms, back of hands, between fingers and under nails.



Rinse well



Dry hands thoroughly



Use a paper towel to shut off the faucet



¡Lávese Las Manos!

No Propague los Gérmenes



Inicie con agua tibia o agua caliente



Use jabón y genere espuma



Frote y restriegue a fondo por 20 segundos – restrigue las palmas, detrás de las manos, entre los dedos y debajo de las uñas.



Enjuague bien



Seque las manos completamente



Use una toalla de papel para cerrar el grifo