

## School Medical Room Guidance for Triaging and Managing Students with Symptoms and Travel History Consistent with COVID-19

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*Note: This guidance is intended for school nurses serving NYC public schools. It provides school medical room guidance for triaging and managing students with symptoms and travel history consistent with COVID-19 as well as general safety and health guidance. This guidance may be modified as other available information and/or guidance warrants.*

### Background:

- Health officials are still learning about the newly discovered respiratory virus, SARS-CoV-2 (formerly 2019-nCoV), how it is transmitted, and the spectrum of illness among infected persons.
- SARS-CoV-2 is the cause of the illness known as COVID-19
- Based on current information, the health risk to New Yorkers is considered low due to the lack of confirmed cases of person-to-person transmission in New York City.
- If person-to-person transmission is confirmed, additional information will be provided as soon as it becomes available.

### **About Coronaviruses**

- Coronaviruses are common in humans and often cause mild upper respiratory tract infections.
- Rarely, coronaviruses, like SARS-CoV-2, capable of causing severe illness, can emerge that infect and spread from person to person.

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing or sneezing
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands

### Monitoring

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently screening people arriving from mainland China for symptoms and advising them on how to monitor themselves for the 14 days after arrival and how to seek care if they become ill. Local health departments are coordinating the monitoring of those students and families.
- All students traveling from mainland China and other [COVID-19 affected geographic areas](#), including countries with Level 2 or 3 travel advisories, who present with symptoms should be triaged and assessed as noted below.



## ***General Preparedness***

- School nurses should engage with the principal of the school/designee or site coordinator about the current 2019 novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, and associated precautions.
- If a school nurse needs support, they should contact their supervisor.

Discussion with the principal/designee/site coordinator include:

- Schools should always have student-friendly “Cover Your Cough” posters at appropriate locations throughout the school in appropriate languages to encourage general infection control.
- Need to identify a private room with a door in close proximity to the medical room for potential isolation needs (the private room should be large enough to maintain a comfortable 6 feet between the student and staff as well as have a desk phone; the room should therefore be larger than 6x6 feet).
- Need to identify Department of Education (DOE) staff (primary and back-up) to:
  - escort a student that meets the criteria for potential COVID-19 infection to the pre-designated private room and
  - provide adult presence during isolation.
  - nurse will provide personal protective equipment to this staff person as indicated below.

***Note: The need to identify a DOE staff is necessary as the school nurse may need to attend to other student medical needs after the school nurse identifies the isolation need.***

In planning for triaging and isolation needs:

- The school nurse should have on-hand adequate supplies to assist with triage needs: face masks, gloves, gown and face shield. Additional supplies can be obtained through Savoy.
- Nurse will also provide DOE staff members with appropriate supplies as needed. Consideration should be made for go-bags/kits to include proper supplies as well as hand sanitizer.

## ***Triage of Students complaining of Fever, Cough or Shortness of Breath***

If a student is complaining of fever, cough or shortness of breath:

- Determine if the student, in the 14 days prior to first onset of symptoms, either:
  - (a) traveled from a [COVID-19 affected geographic areas](#) OR
  - (b) had close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 illness OR
  - (c) is severely ill and requires transport to a medical facility.

*If the student is unable to provide relevant information (based on age or other factors), the school nurse should call the student’s parent/guardian to help with the determination.*

***Protocol for Students complaining of Fever, Cough or Shortness of Breath (SOB) AND Travel From COVID-19 affected geographic areas or Contact with a Person with COVID-19 illness***

If the triage concludes that there was travel to a COVID-19 affected geographic area OR close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 illness (within the 14 days prior to first onset of symptoms), check student temperature as follows:

- Wash hands.
- Don Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the following order: a gown, integrated facemask/face shield, and gloves.
- Take student temperature.
- For those with only recent travel history from a COVID-19 affected geographic area (i.e., no close contact with a person known to have COVID-19):
  - If the student has a fever ( $\geq 100.4F$ ) **AND** a cough or SOB, proceed as per “Notifications and Isolation” section below.
  - If the student does NOT have a fever, handle per standard protocols.
- For those students who have had close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 and who have fever ( $\geq 100.4F$ ), OR cough OR shortness of breath, proceed as per “Notifications and Isolation” section below.

***Notifications and Isolation:***

After determining that potential exposure and illness are present, the school nurse should:

- Place the student in a private room with a door if possible.
- Provide a face mask to the student who can put it on themselves. If student is unable to mask themselves, with student’s permission, place a face mask on the student.
- Inform the student that nurse will talk to the student’s parent/guardian about the illness as well as the principal.
- Notify student’s parent/guardian about the situation, confirm exposure history provided by student, and inform that the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) will be contacted for consult.
- Telephone the principal/designee/site coordinator of the situation. Inform them that they should:
  - Make immediate arrangements to prepare the pre-designated private room and designate a DOE staff member to don a gown, integrated facemask/face shield, and gloves and to escort the student from the medical room to the pre-designated private room. When in the room, the DOE staff should maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from the student.
- When the escort has been completed, the principal or designee will be expected to place an “Occupied” sign on the room door.
- Nurse should perform hand hygiene over gloves with alcohol-based hand sanitizer, remove gloves and immediately wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Then remove the following in this order taking care to touch only the back of the items: gown, integrated facemask/face shield (performing hand hygiene after each step). All items may be disposed of in a plastic garbage bag and placed in a regular garbage can.
- The school nurse should call the Central Communicable Nurse who will contact central DOHMH staff for further guidance.
  - If student is suspected to have COVID-19 infection, specific instructions will be provided which should be reviewed with the principal. The private room should be left with the door closed for a minimum of 2 hours before cleaning and disinfection.



- If student is not referred for further evaluation (i.e., not suspected to have COVID-19 infection), nurse will inform principal/designee/site coordinator and refer the student (through their parent/guardian) to their private physician for further care needs. The private room can be used immediately thereafter for other purposes.
- Once the student is out of the private room, the school staff escort/monitor should perform hand hygiene over gloves with alcohol-based hand sanitizer, remove gloves and immediately wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Then remove the following in this order taking care to touch only the back of the items: gown, integrated facemask/face shield (performing hand hygiene after each step). All items may be disposed of in a regular garbage bag and placed in a regular garbage can.

Please note: If there is a concern for the stability of the student (e.g. life threatening situation), call 911 immediately and alert them about the individual's condition as well as their symptoms and travel history or history of contact with a COVID-19 case so they can take proper precautions and alert the receiving hospital.

### ***Follow Standard Infection Control Precautions***

Routinely employ infection prevention strategies that can prevent transmission of common respiratory viruses (e.g., influenza or "flu," "common cold viruses"). These include:

- stay home if you are sick.
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (in the absence of a tissue, cough or sneeze into your shirt sleeve or bent arm).
- keep your hands clean (wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds).
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- get the flu shot (at this time, there are no current vaccinations for coronaviruses).

The routine use of these infection prevention strategies cannot be overemphasized.

Please remember it is important that as we address this outbreak, we separate facts from fear, and guard against stigma and discrimination. There are a lot of things on social media and in the news that are not rooted in science and are offensive, demeaning and racist. We need to encourage everyone to keep their attention on the facts and support our neighbors. As you interact with families and students during these evaluations, please keep this in mind.