
February 26, 2020

Dear New Mexico School Nurses,

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that have been associated with respiratory illness such as fever, cough and shortness of breath. At this time, respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus, COVID-19, continues to increase in other countries. Although a case of infection has not yet occurred in New Mexico, we understand that this situation is concerning to some students, parents, and staff.

The Department of Health takes this public health threat very seriously and we have been working on developing New Mexico's response should cases be detected in our state. This includes helping communities and individuals understand the risk and prepare appropriately.

It's important to convey to educational staff, students, and parents that risk is based on exposure. Those at higher risk for being infected are:

- People who have traveled to a country with widespread infection (such as China or South Korea) within the last two weeks and have symptoms
- People who had direct close contact with someone who was confirmed to have the novel coronavirus

Like any other virus, no identity, community, ethnic, or racial group in New Mexico is more at risk for getting or spreading COVID-19.

Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how cold viruses and influenza spread. To reduce the risk of infection, current guidance is to:

- Teach and encourage respiratory hygiene (cover nose and mouth when coughing/sneezing and keep hands from touching the face)
- Teach and reinforce correct hand washing and to wash hands with soap and water (or use alcohol-based hand rub)
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or influenza-like symptoms - a distance of 6' is recommended
- Encourage staff, students, and parents to contact their medical provider if influenza-like symptoms develop
- Adhere to school policy to stay home - and be fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications before returning to school
- Ensure regular cleaning and sanitizing of high touch surfaces (doorknobs, handrails, etc.)
- Identify a location in the school building to care for staff and students who may present with influenza-like symptoms until they can go home

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- Although it won't prevent COVID-19 infection, encourage getting the influenza shot if not already vaccinated – it will reduce influenza infections, preserving resources for caring for people with COVID-19 infection

To keep up-to-date with the evolving situation, we encourage you to regularly check the CDC's website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) as well as the NMDOH coronavirus website (<https://nmhealth.org/about/erd/ideb/ncov/>).

The NMDOH will continue to support New Mexico school nurses by monitoring the situation and sharing information and guidance as it becomes available. If you have specific questions or suggestions about the COVID-19 response, please contact the NMDOH Epidemiology Hotline (505 827 0006).

Sincerely,



Thomas Massaro, MD, PHD
School Health Officer



Michael Landen, MD
State Epidemiologist