

Considerations to Prevent the Transmission of Infectious Diseases in Schools

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and considerations for preventing and mitigating the spread of infectious diseases in schools and childcare facilities in Washington, DC. This document can be used by school administrators, school nurses, and other school staff.

ROUTINE ACTIONS TO PREVENT SPREAD OF DISEASE

1) Take Steps for Cleaner Air

- Ensuring existing HVAC systems are providing the minimum outdoor air ventilation requirement in accordance with ventilation design codes.
- Considering ventilation design and/or enhancements when remodeling or constructing new buildings to optimize clean air.
- Considering the use of portable air cleaners, fans, open windows in spaces with low ventilation.

2) Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting

- Consider cleaning and sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys frequently.
- Immediately clean surfaces and objects that are visibly soiled with blood or other body fluids.
 - Wipe or soak up the blood or bodily fluid, clean, and then disinfect the surface
 - Use gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE) as warranted to avoid contact with the fluid
- Consult with DC Health to determine what cleaning and disinfection is needed if a new pathogen emerges, or an outbreak occurs with a specific pathogen like norovirus.

3) Handwashing

- Teach and reinforce proper handwashing techniques.
- During times of increased illness spread or absenteeism, consider evaluating hand hygiene routines and increase these opportunities.
- Schools should provide adequate handwashing supplies (e.g., soap, water, and paper towels) within easy reach of the user.
 - If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be provided.
 - Store hand sanitizers up, away, and out of sight of younger children and allow their use only with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age.

4) Respiratory Etiquette

- Reinforce covering of mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and throwing the used tissue in the trash after use.
 - If a tissue is not available, students and staff can be reminded to sneeze into the elbow, not the hands.
 - Handwashing should be performed immediately after blowing the nose, coughing, or sneezing.

5) Vaccinations

- Staying up to date on recommended vaccinations is essential to prevent illness and to prevent severe illness from some infections.
 - Provide information about vaccines to staff, students, and families.
 - Promote the safety and effectiveness of vaccines.
 - Consider establishing supportive policies and practices that make getting vaccinated easy and convenient, for example developing a workplace vaccination program, providing paid time off for individuals to get vaccinated, or assisting family members receiving vaccinations.
 - Consider making vaccinations available on-site by hosting school-located vaccination clinics, or connect eligible children, students, teachers, staff, and families to off-site vaccination locations.

WHAT TO DO WHEN STUDENTS OR STAFF ARE SICK

1) Stay home when sick

- If someone has the following symptoms, they should stay home:
 - Fever, including a fever with a new rash
 - Vomiting more than twice in the preceding 24 hours
 - Diarrhea that causes ‘accidents’, is bloody, or results in greater than two bowel movements above what the child normally experiences in a 24-hour period
 - Skin sores that are draining fluid on an uncovered part of the body and are unable to be covered with a bandage
 - Respiratory virus symptoms that are worsening or not improving and not better explained by another cause such as seasonal allergies

2) When to return to school

For the general symptoms described in the stay at home when sick section of this guidance, schools and child care facilities can establish policies allowing return to the school setting when:

- The child has not had a fever (and is not using fever-reducing medicine) for at least 24 hours
- Fever with a new rash has been evaluated by a healthcare provider and fever has resolved
- Uncovered skin sores are crusting, and the child is under treatment from a provider
- Vomiting has resolved overnight, and the child can hold down food / liquids in the morning
- Diarrhea has improved, the child is no longer having accidents or is having bowel movements no more than 2 above normal per 24-hour period for the child
- Bloody diarrhea should be evaluated by a healthcare provider prior to return
- Respiratory virus symptoms are getting better overall for at least 24 hours
 - Individuals experiencing respiratory virus symptoms should consider wearing a mask and engaging in other prevention strategies for 5 days following return.

Schools should consider policies and practices that support having students and staff stay home when sick and ensure that employees and families are aware of and understand these policies. In accordance with applicable laws and regulations, schools could:

- Allow flexible, non-punitive paid sick leave policies and practices for staff
- Set policies to accommodate individuals who are sick and avoid incentivizing coming to school or work while sick
- Support children who are learning at home because they are sick

REPORTING

Schools and childcare facilities are required to report certain diseases and conditions to DC Health. For some illnesses, only clusters (3 or more cases within a 7-day period) of confirmed or suspected cases of the same illness are reportable while other illnesses must be reported when 1 case is identified. Please refer to the [Communicable Disease Reference Guide](#) and the [Reportable Disease List](#) for the list of disease and conditions that are reportable to DC Health.

Schools and childcare facilities are encouraged to notify DC Health if they have 25 or more confirmed COVID-19, influenza or RSV cases within a 7-day period.

Reports from non-healthcare settings can be made by submitting a Non-Healthcare Facility Consult Request Form to DC Health using the link below:

<https://dccovid.my.site.com/NonHealthcareConsultRequestForm/s/>

Note: Childcare facilities licensed by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) must report any instance of communicable disease, including COVID-19, to OSSE by submitting an unusual incident report, as required by OSSE licensing regulations.