

# COVID-19 School Updates

**DATE: MARCH 4, 2020**

**MINUTES PREPARED BY: MIKE ZASTOUPIL**

**LOCATION: WEBEX CALL**

## Presenters

- Susan Klammer - Epidemiologist
- Kathy Como-Sabetti - Epidemiologist
- Erika Yoney – State School Health

## Agenda

- Situational Updates
- Key Messages for Schools
- Q&A

## Meeting notes

\*Slides and notes will be sent to participants after the call

## Please note:

The email address for sending schools questions has changed to:  
[health.schools.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto:health.schools.covid19@state.mn.us)

## Situational Updates

- Currently 94,000 known cases of COVID-19 worldwide
- Last reported 128 cases in the U.S.
- State public health laboratories (including MN public health lab) now have the capacity to test for COVID-19
  - Previously this testing was only available from CDC
  - Allows us to test more people
  - We do anticipate cases in MN and more cases nationally as tests are more available
- Travel recommendations
  - CDC has 3 levels of travel warnings

- Level 3 travel warning – all travelers returning to the U.S. from these countries will be required to stay at home for 14 days.
- The reason is that 14 days is the incubation period
- Individuals who are considering seeking healthcare and are concerned about COVID-19 should call ahead to their healthcare provider

## Key Messages for Schools

### First Steps

- Please make sure your school's contact information on MDE.org is correct (see slides)
- Please bookmark and review the MDH and CDC websites on the coronavirus for schools (see slides)
  - CDC Website for Childcare K-12
    - Information for Schools with identified cases vs. Schools without identified cases
    - Includes resources, communication tools, education information, etc.
    - Please get really familiar with these!

### Key Action Steps

- Make sure your emergency operation plan is up to date and ready to implement
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism
  - As families call in with absences, ask for the child's symptoms (just like during flu season)
- Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school
- Recognize that our health offices are open spaces, try to limit exposure to other children with other health issues
- Perform routine environmental cleaning
- Create communications plans for the school community
  - Including open communication lines with emergency folks in the county
- Review CDC's guidance for businesses and employers
- Build handwashing & sanitizing routines into the school day (e.g. transitions between classes, activities)

## School FAQs

Q. Do school nurses need N95 respirator masks?

A. No. Nurses may choose to wear a mask when working in close proximity with students who have a fever. Masks are most effectively used by having individuals who have a fever and cough or shortness of breath while waiting to go home. Masks keep viruses/germs “in”, but there isn’t evidence that it protects healthy people.

Q. Should we exclude students who have traveled outside of the country?

A. Currently, all travelers returning from a country with a level 3 travel notice are asked to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms.

- 14 days is a long time to be out of school, but we want to support them and find ways to support students/teachers to stay home if needed

Q. How do we develop emergency plans for our district?

A. Start by contacting your county emergency preparedness expert.

- The Readiness and Emergency Management ([rems.ed.gov](https://rems.ed.gov)) guide is particularly helpful

Q. How do we know when to close school?

A. MDH will direct this decision, schools do NOT need to make this decision.

### **Messaging Resources (see slides)**

- CDC resources
- MDH also has messaging resources:
  - A sample letter to communicate with families
  - A supply list to prepare for COVID-19 (coming soon)
  - A communication mitigation checklist & guide (coming soon)

## **Q&A**

Q. Should our students go to a robotics event in Iowa, where students and Japan will be attending?

A. At this point there are not travel restrictions for individuals traveling from Japan.

Q. Are you recommending we send letters home?

A. This is not a requirement, but they may help field questions from concerned families. MDH has developed a template letter that will be posted soon.

Q. What if we have a student who has recently traveled from China?

A. Minimal travel from China is occurring at this time. Travelers returning from countries with a level 3 travel notice will receive instructions for isolation and self-monitoring upon deplaning.

Q. Should we be sending children home who have a fever, even if they don't meet the threshold?

A. There are many other illnesses that a child could have. If they have a low-grade fever and they're not well enough to participate, they can be sent home. Otherwise, please continue to follow the guidance in the Infectious Disease Manual for Childcare and School Settings:

<https://www.hennepin.us/daycaremanual>

Q. What should we use to clean computer keyboards and mice?

A. Bleach wipes can be used, similar to what hospitals use. But double-check with your IT people for what disinfecting wipes are safe. List of products known to fight COVID-19:

<https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>

Q. Do we have a case definition different for COVID-19 vs. influenza?

A. They are very similar, but COVID-19 is looking more at lower-respiratory system (cough) vs. upper-respiratory (sore throat).

Q. Where do we get affordable disinfecting supplies (and other supplies)?

A. MDH can't recommend a specific place, but several businesses are increasing their supplies going forward.

Q. If people return from level 3 countries prior to today, do they need to follow the 14 day stay home policy?

A. No, we are not enforcing it prior to today. However, if they are ill, it would be wise for them to stay home regardless.

Q. Staff are scheduling attendance at conferences, should we make plans to not attend?

A. There are no cases currently in MN. It would be good to have a back-up plan, but it is not necessary at this time.

Q. Which hand sanitizer is recommended for COVID-19?

A. Most products are not tested yet against COVID-19. However, if they are effective against other viruses (e.g. influenza, rhinovirus), they should be effective against COVID-19.

- American Chemistry Council list of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Fighting Products: <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>
- For more on the process used to test disinfectants, review the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) viral pathogen product process for making claims against emerging viral pathogens not on EPA-registered disinfectant labels: [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-09/documents/emerging\\_viral\\_pathogen\\_program\\_guidance\\_final\\_8\\_19\\_16\\_001\\_0.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-09/documents/emerging_viral_pathogen_program_guidance_final_8_19_16_001_0.pdf)

Q. Does MDH continue to allow students to travel?

A. We are not currently restricting students to travel anywhere other than the level 3 countries. But it would be wise to plan for canceling or changing travel plans. Official travel restrictions can change rapidly, and frequently.

Q. Is hand sanitizer worth it?

A. Yes, absolutely. But hand washing is even better, especially if there is organic material on someone's hands. Having a routine at school of handwashing or sanitizing will be critical to controlling any spread of COVID-19.

Q. What about travelers returning from other countries, not level 3?

A. If people are ill, they should stay home. Going forward, travel history will become less and less relevant as more community transmission occurs.

Q. For cleaning purposes, does anyone know the length of time COVID-19 can last on surfaces?

A. Viruses generally do not last long on surfaces – especially if they are hard and dry. On hard dry surfaces, it will only last minutes to hours. So, deep cleaning of lockers or hard surfaces is really not necessary.

Q. What can we use to clean computers, if bleach is not an option?

A. Talk to your infection prevention staff, facilities and maintenance or health and safety and follow the guidance from the CDC. Make sure that the disinfectant is effective against other viruses.

- American Chemistry Council list of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Fighting Products: <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>

Q. How do we receive information about upcoming communications from MDH and MDE?

A. Work through the partners that you currently have to get on their distribution list, as MDH is primarily working through partners to distribute information. MDH will be sharing guidance documents and template resources via the website. Notes from meetings will be shared through distribution lists, but they will become outdated quickly so they will not be posted on the website.

Q. Our supplier is out of hand sanitizer, where can we get more?

A. Again, we expect to see stores restocking these products quickly. MDH cannot make any specific recommendations.

Q. Are school districts able to ask students and staff where they have traveled in order to find out if they have been to a level 3 country.

A. That is up to the school district. Again, the travel information is an indicator for now, but as COVID-19 spreads that won't matter as much. The main thing is to send sick people home. Be mindful of not discriminating against certain people when asking these types of questions.

Q. What temperature should student be sent to the doctor with, rather than sent home?

A. Schools should not be requiring students to go to a doctor. Students who are ill should be picked up and go home. It is up to the parents to decide if they should see a doctor. If parents

are concerned that their child might have COVID-19, they should call ahead before they see the doctor.

Q. What about cleaning on buses?

A. The main thing is that school buses should be routinely cleaned.

Q. What do we do about students who have traveled over winter break or February?

A. The incubation period is 14 days, so anything longer ago is not a concern.

Q. If an international tour company does not cancel trips abroad, does the school have any recourse to get their money back?

A. MDH can't say. MDE may be able to answer that question.

Q. We have a choir trip to New York in a week, do you recommend we cancel this trip?

A. No. Again, it would be best to have a backup plan though. Currently there are no travel restrictions within the US.

Q. What happens if family members get sick during the 14 day isolation period?

A. They should isolate themselves and call ahead if they go to see the doctor. Handwashing is recommended. In the future, there may be a process for investigating these sorts of cases.

Q. When should people go home sick? Cough, snuffle?

A. People should certainly go home with a fever, or if they are unable to perform their activities. If people feel ill at all, just stay home – don't push through it. If ill people can limit their contact with others and stay home, that is the most effective way to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. CDC estimates that 1 person with COVID-19 will spread the disease to 3 others – so staying home saves 3 people from getting sick.

Q. Is there an age difference with COVID-19 symptoms/fatalities?

A. There was an article published in JAMA recently. The highest fatality so far has been among older people, and those with chronic illness.

Q. Do you recommend the NASP letter be sent to families?

A. The National Association of School Nurses created a letter in partnership with the National Association of School Psychologists that addresses some of the mental health concerns during this time. MDH is not expressing a formal opinion on the letter but making it available here for schools to evaluate for themselves and determine its' usefulness:

[https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/02292020\\_NASP\\_NASN\\_COVID-19\\_parent\\_handout.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/02292020_NASP_NASN_COVID-19_parent_handout.pdf)

Q. How do we know who should be sent home?

A. Individuals are asked to self-identify, schools are not doing the "policing"

Q. How bad does the fever need to be?

A. It is subjective. If someone feels feverish, they should go home.

Q. Is the mortality rate 2% for everyone in Minnesota?

A. It is difficult to say. There are disease modelers looking at the U.S., and we will have more information in the future. Bad flu season = 6,000 people hospitalized in MN; Good flu season = 2,000 – 3,000 people hospitalized in MN. So COVID-19 may be similar, based on the same population of vulnerable people.

Q. What are the level 3 countries?

A. These change very quickly. As we speak: China, Iran, South Korea, Italy. Please monitor the CDC COVID-19 Travel Notice webpage (See slides) for the most up to date information.

Q. Are there travel restrictions with the U.S.?

A. Currently, there are no travel restrictions within the U.S.

Q. Our office space is very small, should we be using masks?

A. Think of masks as a catcher's mitt. They really only help sick people from coughing or sneezing on others. Healthy people do not need to wear a mask.

## Conclusion

These questions will help inform the content of the next school update, next week.

## For more information, please contact:

Email: [health.schools.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto:health.schools.covid19@state.mn.us)

Phone: 651-201-5414

## Next meeting

Date: Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Time: 10:30 AM, CST

Location: Webex call

**Birth-12 Stakeholder Outreach (COVID-19)** (ie, school nurses, administrators, and superintendents)

Date: Every Wednesday, from Wednesday, March 4, 2020 to Wednesday, May 6, 2020

Time: 10:30 am, Central Standard Time (Chicago, GMT-06:00)

Session number: 968 776 855

Session password: Oshii2020#

<https://minnesota.webex.com/minnesota/k2/j.php?MTID=t5457d0025ccbfcd39beed0855acdf3a>

Toll Free: 1-855-282-6330 | Access code: 968 776 855