



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - March 13, 2020

Coronavirus Guidance from Conference Call

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Executive Directors of Educational Collaboratives, Executive Directors of Approved Special Education Schools, Non-Public School Principals, and School Nurse Leaders,

Thank you to everyone who joined this morning's phone call with me and Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel. This email and the school closure guidance [at this link](#) summarize what we discussed. (Please note that link is connected to

We have reached a point where the virus has progressed, and school leaders have taken steps to close individual schools or even individual districts varying from a single day to longer closures depending on the district's specific situation. In cases where the exposure has been more pronounced, schools have worked with their local boards and DPH to determine the need for longer term closures. Should superintendents have trouble connecting to DPH and need more pressing guidance, I have asked Tom Scott, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, to resend my cell phone number to you so that you can call me. I will work to assist you in getting the support you need.

Coronavirus cases seem, **at this time**, to be isolated geographically, and in fact, we are hearing that many schools are not experiencing any issues. That, however, does not mean that the virus will not accelerate to other areas of the state, if it hasn't already. **At this time, the administration is not asking for a statewide closure, but that could change in the future as circumstances change.**

In that context, I would like to provide some updated guidance:

- DESE is suspending all monitoring and onsite assistance visits, except in a few special circumstances. We want you to focus on what matters most, which is keeping your students and staff safe. If you want our assistance, we will be happy to provide it virtually.
- We are looking to determine whether the April 1 deadline for submission of the Student Opportunity Act plans can be extended. This deadline is state law, so we will need to work with legislature.
- We have not made any changes to the MCAS testing schedule at this time, but we reserve the right to extend or move the assessment windows or take other action as

needed. For example, we are looking into the 10th grade ELA test and will get more information to you as soon as we can.

- There may be an opportunity for a one-year assessment and accountability waiver from the federal government, but even if that is granted, we would need legislative relief from our state legislature to waive the state law around the testing requirement.
- The MIAA has canceled all winter sporting events scheduled for this weekend
- We hope to sending a letter to districts that they can share with families about the coronavirus.

School Meals:

- USDA has approved Massachusetts' waiver request to allow schools where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals to continue providing meals to students if the school closes. We also received approval to have schools serve these meals in an appropriate format, such as a "grab-and-go" option for students to take home.
 - We encourage schools to start thinking about ways to keep their kitchens open to continue providing meals to students.
- Only public schools where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals are currently eligible for USDA reimbursement under such circumstances. Other schools can choose to provide meals at their own discretion if their school is closed, but DESE cannot currently approve those meals for USDA reimbursement.
- Additionally, community-based organizations that participated in the USDA Summer Food Service Program in 2019 are eligible to serve and claim meals for reimbursement to help with school closures.

Special Education

If a school closure causes educational services for all students to pause within a school or district, then the school or district is generally not required to provide services to the affected students with disabilities during that same period of time. However, districts should be communicating with parents and guardians prior to, during, and after a school closure regarding their child's IEP services. This ongoing communication will help educators, administrators, and parents/caregivers understand any impact of the closure on students' access to a free and appropriate public education. After an extended closure, districts should review how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services and convene individual IEP team meetings if necessary. Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston will contact special education directors to hold a webinar related to special education concerns as soon as possible.

Bullying and Harassment

COVID-19 is not at all connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. School staff should be mindful that bullying, intimidation, or harassment of students, staff, families and others based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability (including the actual disability of being infected with COVID-19 or perception of being infected) may result in a violation of state and federal civil rights laws. School districts must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate what occurred when responding to reports of bullying or harassment. If parents and families believe that their child has experienced bullying, harassment, or intimidation related to the COVID-19 outbreak, they should contact their school district's designated civil rights compliance coordinator.

Notes from doctors:

Please do not require doctor's notes for students. Doctors have too many other things to do at this point.

Privacy

Students and staff may be disclosing private health information to you. Please preserve their privacy to the greatest extent possible while also taking whatever steps needed to address any COVID-19 exposure. If someone at your school is diagnosed with the virus, the public does not need to know their name or other details that reveal their identity.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

GUIDANCE TO ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS REGARDING COVID-19

The spread of the virus associated with COVID-19 has reached an inflection point at the global, national, and state levels, and the number of confirmed and presumptive positive COVID-19 cases and their close contacts in the Commonwealth continue to grow. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker has declared a state of emergency to be able to give the Administration more flexibility to respond to this outbreak.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) and local health departments are increasingly called upon to make recommendations to local school districts and individual schools about how best to respond to known and suspected exposures and for information about more generalized risk of transmission in the community.

While to date, young children and adolescents appear to be less seriously affected by the virus (whether resistant to initial infection or less likely to develop severe symptoms) school settings represent contexts of close physical contact among young people, with adult school staff, and families served by schools.

With this in mind, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and DPH are instructing schools to take the following steps:

1. Effective immediately, all schools must cancel or reschedule large events or gatherings (including assemblies) of 250 people or more for the foreseeable future. Schools are strongly urged to postpone or cancel other events if students, staff, and others cannot maintain recommended social-distancing practices by staying 6 feet apart from one another. Schools should consider postponing or canceling sporting events, but if such events are held, attendance should be limited to the participants and their families. This recommendation includes any organized youth athletic programs, club sports, intramural activities, and competitions, whether or not they are affiliated with or sponsored by a school or school district.
2. All schools must implement policies on expanded environmental cleaning, whether or not there has been a known case of COVID-19 in the school. Schools must clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily using an [EPA-registered disinfectant](#).

Additional guidance for example situations school districts may encounter is provided below.

Scenario 1: A student's household member has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or a staff household member has been diagnosed with COVID-19

Guidance:

1. The student or staff member with a family member who tested positive for COVID-19 will be required to quarantine at home. In general, people in quarantine who have not developed symptoms are not considered high risk for transmission of the virus. The student or staff member may return to school once the 14-day quarantine period has ended, as advised by the local board of health.

2. School leadership should work with DPH or the local health board to discuss the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school and consider a school closure for purposes of comprehensive cleaning.
3. If a decision is made that the school should be closed for cleaning, the school should be closed for **no more than 2 days**.
 - When a school suspects an individual with COVID-19 has visited the school. The school should be cleaned. CDC guidance recommends waiting up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfecting. Schools should follow the [CDC guidance](#) for cleaning and disinfection.
4. Other students or staff 1) who have not been in close contact with a positive case, and 2) who show no signs or symptoms of illness may continue to attend school. Close contact includes:
 - Living in the same household as a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Caring for a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 15 minutes, **or**
 - Being in direct contact with secretions from a sick person with COVID-19 (e.g., being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).

Scenario 2: A student or staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19

Guidance:

1. The student or staff member who tested positive for COVID-19 will be required to isolate at home. The student or staff member may not return to school until they are authorized to leave their home by the local board of health.
2. Anyone who has had close contact (defined as physical contact or sharing of airspace within six feet for more than 15 minutes) with a positive case should be immediately identified and should consult with DPH and/or the local health department. DPH or the local health department will, where appropriate, require quarantining at home according. Close contact includes:
 - Living in the same household as a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Caring for a sick person with COVID-19, **or**
 - Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 15 minutes, **or**
 - Being in direct contact with secretions from a sick person with COVID-19 (e.g., being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).Quarantined individuals that have questions or concerns related to their quarantine should contact DPH or their local health department.
3. School leadership should work with DPH or the local health board to discuss the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school. If the student has been at school in close contact with other students immediately prior to the diagnosis school leadership should **close the school for at least 14 days**. Decisions about school closure should be made on a school-by-school basis **not at the school district level**. Additional guidance is available from the [CDC](#).
4. School leadership should work with the local health board during the quarantine period to monitor additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the district and should discuss protocols for reopening the school.

Scenario 3: A student or staff member has returned from international travel.

Guidance:

1. All returning travelers from high risk [Level 3 countries](#) must self-quarantine for 14 days.
2. This precludes post-travel presence in a school setting during the time of quarantine.
3. If a student or staff member recently returned from traveling to a Level 3 country, but has come to school, school's should follow procedures described above in Scenario 1.

Scenario 4: There is sustained community transmission in my local community, possibly including members of the school community

1. Currently there are no communities in the Commonwealth that meet this criteria.
2. If sustained community transmission develops in a community within the Commonwealth, school leadership should work with DPH or the local health board to discuss the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school.
3. School leadership should consider closing or dismissing the school or group of schools, which may include the entire school district **for at least 14 days**. The goal of this action is to increase social distancing for both students and staff and to encourage parents/guardians to practice social distancing from work and other group settings.
4. School leadership should work with DPH and their local health departments to make a determination about when to reopen the school.