



CHIPPEWA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

508 Ashmun, Suite 120

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan 49783

www.chippewahd.com

March 12, 2020

Partner in Health:

As partners in protecting the health and safety of our children and families, below you will find a brief situational update as well as current recommendations for school administrators and decision makers based on guidance from Chippewa County Health Department (CCHD). Please understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and CCHD will continue to communicate with you as information changes.

WHAT IS KNOWN

- The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified and causes a respiratory illness ranging from a mild cold-like illness to severe pneumonia.
- More than 80% of people diagnosed with COVID-19 in China had mild disease.
- Similar to influenza, the people who are most likely to have severe disease and complications from COVID-19 are older individuals (>60 years old) and those with other medical conditions like heart and lung disease or diabetes.
- There is no vaccine or treatment currently available for COVID-19.
- As of March 12, 2020, there are 2 presumptive positive COVID-19 cases in Michigan. At this time cases are in Wayne and Oakland Counties.
- As of March 12, 2020, there is **NO** confirmed community spread of COVID-19 in Chippewa County, but experts predict there will eventually be community spread.

HOW THE VIRUS SPREADS

- COVID-19 is believed to spread primarily the same way the common cold or flu spreads—through respiratory droplets that are produced when someone coughs or sneezes.
- People who are most at risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 are those who have been in close contact (within about 6 feet) with someone who has the disease.
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread of the virus might be possible before a person has symptoms, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO NOW, PRIOR TO LOCAL COMMUNITY SPREAD

- Implement your annual seasonal influenza plan.
 - Students and staff who are ill, especially with fever and/or acute respiratory symptoms (not allergies or chronic conditions), should stay home.
 - Review sick policies for staff; ensure staff can stay home when ill.
- Ensure prescribed cleaning is happening at school facilities (routine disinfectants are appropriate).
 - Enhance cleaning of high touch surfaces like doorknobs, toilet handles, and sink handles.

Environmental Health
906.635.3620

Home Health & Hospice
906.635.1568

Personal & Family Health
906.635.1566

Main Fax
906.253.1466

- Ensure that hand sanitizer, soap/paper towels and tissues are widely available in school facilities.
- Remind students to cover their coughs/sneezes with a tissue or their elbow.
- Plan for when community spread occurs (non-pharmaceutical interventions or NPIs).
 - Ensure parents/guardians have a plan to designate a caregiver (under the age of 60) for a sick child(ren) if parents/guardians can't stay home.
 - Look for opportunities to address food insecurity for families who rely on schools for breakfast and/or lunch.
 - Identify at-home learning opportunities during student absences or school closures.
 - Identify how the school will communicate updates to parents/guardians.
 - For more information about use of NPIs to respond to pandemics, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS DO NOW

Per Governor Whitmer's and Director Robert Gordon's guidance on March 11, 2020:

1. Educate students and the community about COVID-19 and preventive hygiene practices.
2. Encourage staff and students to stay home when sick.
3. Report influenza-like activity, absenteeism, and potential school dismissals to public health officials.
4. Separate sick students and staff from others until they can go home. When feasible, identify a "sick room" through which others do not regularly pass.
5. Communicate and reinforce best practices for washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes.
6. Regularly clean and frequently disinfect touched surfaces, like doorknobs, keyboards, desks, cell phones, and light switches.
7. Limit large gatherings (e.g., greater than 100 people in a shared space) such as assemblies, inter-school interactions, as well as field trips and school-sponsored travel.
8. Schools with students at risk of severe illness should consider plans for learning at a distance for those students, to the extent feasible.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS BEFORE CLOSING SCHOOLS FOR COVID-19

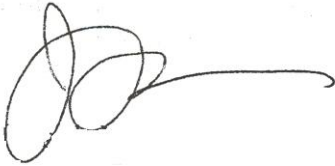
- Chippewa County Department would recommend the closure of schools **only** if there is an imminent danger or the need to reduce transmission risk of COVID-19 disease.
- Careful consideration for school closure recommendations will take into account the severity of disease, benefits to public health, and impact on student learning, families, childcare, school staff and the economy.
- Schools in Chippewa County considering closure due to COVID-19 (or other infectious diseases) should work with CCHD **before** closing. Please contact CCHD if you are considering closing a school or prior to taking any actions.

Although some colleges and universities are choosing to move toward virtual instruction instead of face-to-face instruction, that does not mean that K-12 settings should opt for parallel action. Colleges and universities are dramatically different environments with unique opportunities for disease transmission, such as housing in dormitories, that are not present in K-12 schools.

CCHD staff are working day and night to monitor this evolving situation and will continue to provide new information to the community as things change. If you have questions or are seeing increases in illness and would like to consult with our team, please call us at 1-800-221-0294.

For up-to-date information, please follow us on Facebook or visit www.chippewahd.com.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal tail extending to the right.

Joseph M. Garlinghouse, MD, MPH, CAQPHM
Medical Director
Chippewa County Health Department