

James Adams
Superintendent of Schools



Ashland Public Schools
Central Administration Offices

Office of the Superintendent
Tel: 508-881-0150
Fax: 508-881-0161

February 27, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians, Students and Staff

As many of you are aware due to the constant reporting by various news mediums, there is a heightened focus on the “coronavirus,” which has been officially named by the CDC as COVID-19 (CoronaVirus Infectious Disease identified in 2019). Please find below some of the guidance we have received from various Health Organizations.

Per the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), as of this writing, Massachusetts has one confirmed case of COVID-19 and the risk to our residents remains low. In the US, there are only 53 cases confirmed. Only one of these cases was confirmed to be passed through human contact (husband to wife). At the same time, the risk for the influenza virus is very high. It is important to note that residents are much more likely to become sick with a cold or the flu than to be exposed to COVID-19. The guidance letter sent to all schools is available at the DPH website at: www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus. Here is a useful fact sheet in many languages to assist you in learning about this virus: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/information-on-the-outbreak-of-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19#-printable-fact-sheets->.

I have included a link and the letter sent by the Department of Health and Human Services to school nurses and administrators. <https://www.smore.com/2nqcv-school-covid-19-guidance-memo?ref=email-content#w-2928018050>

While this is a public health concern, and the immediate risk remains low at this time, we do have numerous district families who travel during school vacation weeks, so the potential for infectious disease is always of concern. As with seasonal flu and strep infections, there are general precautions we can all take to remain as healthy as possible.

- Practice good hand hygiene. Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Use Alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. You can also cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid sharing drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, dishes, towels or other items. Wash these items thoroughly with soap and water after use.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick whenever possible.
- Practice other good health habits: Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Additionally, it is important to keep children home from school when they are ill. If your child has any of the following symptoms please keep them home or have them checked by your family doctor before sending to school: a temperature greater than 100.0, constant coughing, vomiting, diarrhea, any rash not yet diagnosed by a physician, red or pink itchy eye, and/or drainage from eye, and any contagious illness such as chicken pox, strep throat or flu.

COVID-19 is an evolving situation that we are following closely and will continue to update you as information is shared with us. Please rest assured that we are monitoring student health concerns. We are in close communication with the Ashland’s Board of Health, our school nurses, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health/School Health Unit. Our School Facilities Department is vigilantly sanitizing our educational spaces as we typically do during cold and flu season. We are following all recommended guidelines to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

Be well,

James E. Adams
Superintendent of Schools

87 West Union Street, Ashland Massachusetts 01721
www.ashland.k12.ma.us

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor

KARYN E. POLITO
Lieutenant Governor



MARYLOU SUDDERS
Secretary

MONICA BHAREL, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Tel: 617-624-6000
www.mass.gov/dph

February 24, 2020

Dear School Administrator,

We are writing to you today with information and guidance regarding infection caused by the new coronavirus, now known as COVID-19, first identified in Wuhan, China in late December 2019.

At this time, Massachusetts has one confirmed case of COVID-19 and the risk to our residents remains low. At the same time, the risk for the influenza virus is very high.

The vast majority of reported cases of COVID-19 are in China. Confirmed cases of this respiratory virus associated with travel from Wuhan are also being reported in a growing number of countries, including the United States. Some person-to-person spread of this virus outside China has been detected but, again, the risk to Massachusetts residents remains low at this time.

We know that outbreaks of new virus infections are always of public health concern. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), other federal agencies, local boards of health, and our clinical partners to share the most up to date information available.

It is important to note that Massachusetts residents are much more likely to become sick with a cold or the flu than to be exposed to COVID-19. Many of the precautions that help prevent colds and the flu can help protect against other respiratory viruses.

Please share this with your school nurse and other school health personnel.

Recommended guidance

As of this writing, it is **extremely unlikely** that anyone with travel to mainland China within the past 14 days would be at school. As of February 3, 2020, travelers from mainland China are arriving into the U.S. at 11 airports (not including Logan airport in Boston) and are being screened upon entry. Travelers who are ill or who have traveled in the high-risk area of Hubei Province are being quarantined at the point of entry. Travelers from other parts of China without symptoms are being told to stay at home for 14 days from day of arrival.

If students, staff or volunteers do come to the nurse's office with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from China in the last 14 days OR are ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND had recent close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case or had recent close contact with someone under investigation by public health authorities for COVID-19, these are guidelines to follow:

- Place the individual in a private room, ask them to wear a face mask and close the door.

- Ask the individual about symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, difficulty breathing). Other symptoms could include: chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. If you are in the same room as the individual, wear a face mask and stand at least 6 feet away.
- If the individual requires immediate medical care, call 911 for an ambulance, inform EMS of the individual's recent travel to China.
- Call the DPH Epidemiology Line at 617-983-6800 or your local board of health for additional guidance.

The precautions to help prevent colds and the flu can help protect against COVID-19.

DPH recommends that schools continue education about good hygiene. Students, staff, and volunteers should be reminded to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, if unable to wash, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve (not with your hands)
- Stay away from people who are sick and stay home when you are sick

Schools should follow their regular cleaning and disinfection program.

- Clean hard surfaces (desks, tables, countertops, sinks). Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (door handles, faucets, railings), bathrooms and health rooms. Use alcohol wipes to clean keyboards.
- Use "EPA-approved" disinfectant to clean high-touch surfaces and patient care areas.
- Clean the surface first to remove all organic matter. Thorough cleaning with soap and water will remove most microorganisms.
- Custodial staff is trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills.

For more information

DPH has created a website updated constantly with the latest guidance, including printable fact sheets in multiple languages. Visit: www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus.

For questions, call the DPH Epidemiology Line at 24 hours a day/7 days a week at 617-983-6800.

For more, visit the CDC website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Thank you for your help to keep our students and school personnel healthy and safe.