

Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Health officials are taking steps to prevent community spread of COVID-19 into US communities. Institutions of higher education (IHE) can play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, IHE should disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission to their students, staff, and faculty. IHE should prepare to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their students, staff, and faculty should local health officials identify such a need. IHE should continue to collaborate, share information, and review plans with local health officials to help protect their entire IHE community, including those who may be at risk for severe disease with COVID-19. IHE plans should be designed to minimize disruption to teaching and learning and protect students and staff from social stigma and discrimination.

Who is this guidance for?

This interim guidance is intended to help administrators of public and private institutions of higher education (IHE) prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, staff, and faculty. IHE include a diverse set of American colleges and universities: 2- or 4-year; public, private non-profit, or private for-profit; and comprehensive, research-focused, or special mission. IHE administrators are individuals who make policies and procedures, set educational aims and standards, and direct programming of institutions of higher education. Administrators include a range of higher education leaders and managers, such as department chairs/heads, deans, presidents, and provosts.

Why is this guidance being issued?

Information provided should help IHE and their partners understand how to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 among students, faculty, and staff. It also aims to help IHE react quickly should a case be identified. The guidance includes considerations to help administrators plan for the continuity of teaching, learning, and research if there is community spread of COVID-19 and address concerns related to COVID-19 associated stigma.

What is the role of IHE in responding to COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) virus, and we are learning more about it every day. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping transmission (spread) of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy. Learn more about [COVID-19](#).

IHE, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of disease. IHE's efforts will help ensure students, staff, and faculty have safe and healthy environments in which to learn and work. IHE welcome students, staff, faculty, and visitors from throughout the community. All of these people may have close contact in IHE settings, often sharing spaces, equipment, and supplies.

Some individuals are experiencing stigma and discrimination in the United States related to COVID-19. This includes people of Chinese and Asian descent, as well as some returning travelers and emergency responders who may have been exposed to the virus. It is important for IHE to provide accurate and timely information about COVID-19 to students, staff, and faculty to minimize the potential for stigma on college and university campuses. It is also important to provide mental health support to promote resilience among those groups affected by stigma regarding COVID-19. CDC has [information](#) IHE can share to reduce COVID-19 associated fear and stigma.

Guidance for IHE that do not have COVID-19 identified in their community

To prepare for possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for IHE to do now is **plan and prepare**. As the global outbreak evolves, IHE should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks. IHE want to **be ready** in the event COVID-19 does appear in their communities.

IHE administrators nationwide can take steps now to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs). This should be done in collaboration with local health departments, the IHE's university system, and other relevant partners. Focus on components, or annexes, of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks.

- Ensure the plan is updated to include strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases. Effective strategies build on everyday policies and practices.
- Ensure the plan emphasizes preventive actions for students and staff. Emphasize actions individuals can take, including staying home when sick, appropriately covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and washing hands often.
 - CDC has workplace resources including guidance posters with messages for staff about [staying home when sick](#) and how to [avoid spreading germs at work](#).
- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
 - CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](#) and information on [proper handwashing technique](#).
- Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing the EOP.
 - Multiple federal agencies have developed resources on school planning principles and a 6-step process for creating plans to build and continually foster safe and healthy school

communities *before, during, and after* possible emergencies. IHE may find this [guidance for developing high-quality emergency operations](#) plans helpful.

- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA for schools, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

Develop information-sharing systems with partners.

- Institutional information systems should be used for day-to-day reporting on information such as absenteeism or changes in student health center traffic to detect and respond to an outbreak.
- Local health officials should be a key partner in information sharing.

Monitor and plan for absenteeism.

- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Students, staff, and faculty should not attend class or work when sick. Allow them to stay home to care for sick household members. Make accommodations (e.g., extended due dates, electronic submission of assignments), as possible, for individuals who may be temporarily unable to attend class due to restrictions placed on them related to possible exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff and faculty.
- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your institution and on your campus among students, staff, and faculty. Consider identifying and implementing processes for faculty and IHE leadership to report noticeable changes in absenteeism, even if subjective, to a designated administrator.
- Alert local health officials about large increases in student, staff, and faculty absenteeism or substantial increases in student health center traffic due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the flu, which have symptoms similar to symptoms of COVID-19).
- Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching, learning, and research.

Establish procedures for students, staff, and faculty who are sick (with any illness) on campus.

- Establish procedures to ensure students, staff, and faculty who become sick (with any illness) on campus or arrive on campus sick are sent to their place of residence as soon as possible.
- Keep sick individuals separate from well individuals until they can leave.
- Sick residents of on-campus housing in communities with no identified COVID-19 and who are not believed to have been exposed to COVID-19 should avoid contact with well individuals while sick.

Ensure IHE health clinics prepare for COVID-19.

- Review CDC guidance to help health care facilities prepare for COVID-19. Guidance includes [steps to take now](#) and strategies for [preparing for community transmission](#) of COVID-19.

Perform routine environmental cleaning.

- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, countertops) with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down by students, staff, and faculty before each use.

Create plans to communicate accurate and timely information to the IHE community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and faculty without increasing fear and [stigma](#). Keeping the community informed with accurate information can counter the spread of misinformation and reduce the potential for fear and stigma.
- Include strategies to communicate steps being taken by the IHE to prepare and how additional information will be shared.
- Include strategies to communicate changes to usual campus schedules or functions.
- Include strategies to communicate information IHE community members can use to [protect themselves](#) from infectious disease, including COVID-19.

Review CDC's guidance for businesses and employers.

- Review this CDC [guidance](#) to identify any additional strategies the IHE can use, given its role as an employer.

IHE administrators can also support their IHE community by sharing COVID-19 informational resources with students, staff, and faculty. Coordinate with local health officials to determine what type of information is best to share with the IHE community. Consider sharing the following fact sheets and [information sources](#):

- Information about COVID-19 available through [state](#) and [local](#) health departments
- General fact sheets to help students, staff, faculty, and their families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
 - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19](#)
 - [Share facts about COVID-19 to help prevent stigma](#)
- CDC information for students, staff, and faculty who have recently traveled back to the United States from areas where CDC has identified community spread of coronavirus:

- A list of countries where community spread of COVID-19 is occurring can be found on the CDC webpage: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#)

For guidance for **students, staff, or faculty who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19**, refer to CDC's [FAQ for travelers](#) and COVID-19 travel [website](#). For specific guidance on **foreign exchange and study abroad programs**, see CDC's [guidance on student foreign travel for IHE](#).

All information referenced in this document was derived from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).