



Higher Education Guidance on Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

This document is intended to be statewide guidance to help both school and public health officials inform their decision making. Decisions by school officials and local public health officials should be determined by the specific circumstances in local jurisdictions.

Please check the following link periodically for updated interim guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/covid19.

Background

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel virus that has been spreading worldwide. Community-acquired cases have now been confirmed in South Carolina. We are gaining more understanding of COVID-19's epidemiology, clinical course, immunogenicity, and other factors as time progresses, and the situation is changing daily. DHEC is in the process of monitoring COVID-19, conducting testing with local and federal partners, and providing guidance and resources to prevent, detect and respond to the occurrence of COVID-19 cases in South Carolina.

At this time, community transmission of COVID-19 has occurred in South Carolina. Educational institutions should prepare for possible impacts of COVID-19 and take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as other infectious diseases, including influenza and gastroenteritis.

Illness Severity

Both Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) have been known to cause severe illness in people. The complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is not fully understood. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild to severe, including illness resulting in death. There are ongoing investigations to learn more. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available.

Watch for Symptoms

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.

The following symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure**.

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

What is the role of schools 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](#).

Institutions of higher education (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 sickpdf icon](#) and how to [avoid spreading germs at workpdf icon](#).
- Ensure hand-washing 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 six-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 operationsexternal icon](#) plans helpful.
 - Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [websiteexternal icon](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA for schools, including IHE, and their community partners, 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 healthcare 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 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 [localexternal icon](#) 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 \(COVID-19\)pdf icon](#)
 - [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-19pdf icon](#)
- [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**.

Guidance for IHE with identified cases of COVID-19 in their community

If local health officials report that there are cases of COVID-19 in the community, IHE need to take additional steps in **response** to prevent further spread of the disease. The first step for IHE in this situation is to talk with local health officials.

Determine if, when, and for how long the IHE may need to suspend classes and postpone or cancel events and activities.

Temporarily suspending classes is a strategy to stop or slow the further spread of COVID-19 in communities. When classes are suspended, IHE may stay open for staff or faculty (unless ill) while students temporarily stop attending in-person classes. Keeping the IHE facilities open a) allows faculty to develop and deliver lessons and materials electronically, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning; and b) allows other staff members to continue to provide services and help with additional response efforts.

IHE administrators should work in close collaboration with local health officials and the IHE's university system to make class suspension and event and activity cancellation decisions. IHE are not expected to make decisions about suspending classes or canceling events on their own. IHE can seek specific guidance from local health officials to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps. Class suspension and event and activity (e.g., on-campus sporting, theater, and music events) cancellation may be recommended for at least 14 days, or possibly longer if advised by local health officials. The nature of these actions (e.g., geographic scope, duration) may change as the local outbreak situation evolves.

If a student, staff, or faculty member attended class or was active on campus prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case:

- **Local health officials may recommend temporary class suspension and event or activity cancellation.** Individuals may be considered active on campus if they had attended class, work, work-study, or some other type of gathering or event (e.g., student meetings, recreational activities) on campus. Local health officials' recommendations for the scope (e.g., all campuses in a university system or only select campuses) and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the impacted community.
- **IHE should work with the local health department and other relevant leadership to communicate the possible COVID-19 exposure.** This communication to the IHE

community should align with the communication plan in the IHE's emergency operations plan. In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student, staff member, or faculty member as required by the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) [external icon](#) and the [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act](#) [external icon](#).

- **IHE administrators should seek guidance from local health officials to determine when students, staff, and faculty should return to campus and what additional steps are needed for the IHE community.** In addition, students, staff, and faculty who are well but are taking care of or share a home with someone with a case of COVID-19 should follow instructions from local health officials to determine when to return to campus.

If classes are suspended, IHE can consider the following steps:

- **Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events.**
 - Cancel or postpone events such as club meetings, performances, social events, athletic team practices, and sporting events.
- **Discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering or socializing anywhere.**
 - Discourage gatherings at places like at a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or a local coffee shop.
- **Ensure continuity of education and research.**
 - Review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching, learning, and research. Implement e-learning plans and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate.
 - Ensure continuity plans address how to temporarily postpone, limit, or adapt research-related activities (e.g., study recruitment or participation, access to labs) in a manner that protects the safety of researchers, participants, facilities, and equipment.
 - Consider the following approaches:
 - Use of existing infrastructure and services (e.g., Blackboard, Skype, Zoom) to support efficient transition of classes from in-person to distance-based formats. This may include using strategies such as faculty check-ins, recorded class meetings or lectures, and live class meetings.
 - Other student support services such as online library services, print materials available online, phone- or internet-based counseling support, or study groups enabled through digital media.
 - IHE will need to determine, in consultation with their university system:
 - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train faculty to do so.
 - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff
 - How to deal with the potential lack of students' access to computers and the Internet at home or in temporary housing.
 - **Ensure continuity of safe housing.**
 - **Work in close collaboration with local health officials to make all decisions related to on-campus housing.**
 - **If cases of COVID-19 have not been identified among residents of on-campus community housing,** students may be allowed to remain in on-campus housing. In this situation, educate housing residents on the precautions they should take to help protect themselves when there is community spread of COVID-19. Residents should follow any more specific recommendations provided by local health officials.

- **If cases of COVID-19 have been identified among residents of on-campus community housing, work with local health officials to take additional precautions.** Individuals with COVID-19 may need to be moved to temporary housing locations. These individuals will need to self-isolate and monitor for worsening symptoms according to the guidance of local health officials. [Close contacts](#) of the individuals with COVID-19 may also need temporary housing so that they can self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms. Consult with local health officials to determine when, how, and where to move ill residents. Information on providing home care to individuals with COVID-19 who do not require hospitalization is available on CDC's [website](#).
 - Residents identified with COVID-19 or identified as contacts of individuals with COVID-19 should not necessarily be sent to their permanent homes off-campus. Sending sick residents to their permanent homes could be unfeasible, pose logistical challenges, or pose risk of transmission to others either on the way to the home or once there. IHEs should work with local health officials to determine appropriate housing for the period in which they need to self-isolate and monitor for symptoms or worsening symptoms.
 - Remember to consider all types of IHE-affiliated housing when making response plans. Distinct housing types (e.g., residence halls, apartments, fraternity and sorority houses) and situations (e.g., housing owned and run by the IHE, housing on the IHE campus but not run by the IHE) may require tailored approaches.
 - Ensure any staff remaining to support students in on-campus housing receive necessary training to protect themselves and residents from spread of COVID-19. Staff should also be trained on how to respond if a resident becomes ill.
- **Ensure continuity of meal programs.**
 - Consult with local health officials to determine strategies for modifying food service offerings to the IHE community.
 - Consider ways to distribute food to students, particularly those who may remain on campus, while classes or other events and activities are dismissed.
 - If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid food distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bagged lunches or meal delivery.
 - Consider if and how existing dining services should be scaled back or adapted. For example, an IHE may close some of or all its cafeterias/cafes to discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering in group settings.
 - If on-campus housing residents have been relocated to temporary alternative housing, consider how meals can be provided to these students. Work with local health officials to determine strategies for providing meals to residents with COVID-19 or who are being monitored because of contact with persons with COVID-19.
 - Ensure any staff remaining on campus to support food services receive necessary training to protect themselves and those they serve from spread of COVID-19.
- **Consider if and when to stop, scale back, or modify other support services on campus.**

- Consider alternatives for providing students with essential medical and social services. Identify ways to ensure these services are provided while classes are dismissed or students are in temporary housing.
- Identify other types of services provided to students, staff, and faculty (e.g., library services, cleaning services). Consider ways to adapt these to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission while maintaining services deemed necessary.
- **Help counter [stigma](#) and promote resilience on campus.**
- Share facts about COVID-19 through trusted dissemination channels to counter the spread of misinformation and mitigate fear.
- Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people.
- Develop plans to support students, staff, and faculty who may feel overwhelmed by COVID-19 and associated events on campus.
 - Ensure continuity of mental health services, such as offering remote counseling. Encourage students to call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) if they are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like wanting to harm themselves or others

CDC Resources

- [Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)
- [Guidance for Student Foreign Travel for Institutions of Higher Education](#)