

# Institutes of Higher Education FAQs for Administrators

## Planning and Preparedness

### WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER AS I PLAN AND PREPARE FOR COVID-19?

Administrators should always reinforce healthy practices to everyone on campus and prepare for a potential case of COVID-19, regardless of the current level of community transmission.

As you create and update your preparedness plans, work with your local health officials to determine the most appropriate plan and action for your college or university. Together, you will need to consider your local community situation—whether you have local transmission in your community, and if so, the level of transmission (none/minimal, minimal to moderate, substantial).

CDC has created overall guidance, as well as tailored guidance for transmission level in your area to help colleges, universities and their partners understand how to help prevent COVID-19 and react quickly when a case is identified. The guidance includes information about the following:

- How to prepare if you have no community spread of COVID-19.
- How to prepare if you have minimal to moderate community spread in your community.
- How to prepare if you have substantial community spread in your community.
- What to do if a person with COVID-19 has entered your school.

[See CDC's full interim guidance for more details.](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.html)

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### WHAT GROUPS SHOULD I WORK WITH IN OUR COMMUNITY TO PREPARE?

Work with your local health department to develop/update your emergency operations plan and information-sharing system. Institutional information systems can be used to get accurate and up-to-date information, and day-to-day absenteeism or changes in student health center traffic can help detect and respond to an outbreak.



## WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN MY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN?

Review and update your emergency operations plan in collaboration with your [local health department](#). Focus on the components or annexes of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks.

- Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). This includes strategies for social distancing and school dismissal that may be used to stop or slow the spread of infectious disease. The plan should also include strategies for continuing education, meal programs, and other related services in the event of school dismissal.
- Ensure the plan emphasizes everyday preventive actions for students and staff. For example, emphasize actions such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often.

## HOW CAN OUR CAMPUS HEALTH CLINIC PREPARE FOR COVID-19?

Visit [CDC's healthcare facilities](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/steps-to-prepare.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/steps-to-prepare.html> page for recommended steps healthcare facilities can take now to prepare for COVID-19.

## WHAT CAN STAFF AND STUDENTS DO TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19?

Encourage students and staff to take [everyday preventive actions](#) to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses. These actions include staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if they are visibly dirty.

## WHAT RESOURCES DOES CDC HAVE AVAILABLE TO SHARE WITH STAFF, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS?

Share resources with the school community to help them understand COVID-19 and steps they can take to protect themselves:

- CDC [COVID-19 household guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/protect-home.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/protect-home.html>
- CDC's [health communication resources](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>
- CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html> and information on [proper handwashing technique](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
- CDC information on [stigma and COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/reducing-stigma.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/reducing-stigma.html>.

## **HOW SHOULD MY SCHOOL PREPARE WHEN THERE IS MINIMAL TO MODERATE COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION IN OUR AREA?**

Work with your local health officials to determine a set of strategies appropriate for your community's situation. Continue using the preparedness strategies implemented for no community transmission, and consider the following social distancing strategies:

- Cancel large gatherings
- Cancel or modify courses where students are likely to be in very close contact.
- Increase space between desks.
- Reduce congestion in the health clinic.
- Consider if and how existing dining services should be scaled back or adapted.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION?**

If local health officials have determined there is substantial transmission of COVID-19 within the community, they will provide guidance to administrators on the best course of action for their college or university. Similar strategies will extend across organizations (e.g., K-12 schools, business, community and faith-based organizations) in a collective effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Measures will likely include extended class suspension and event/activity cancellations (e.g., suspension/cancellations for longer than two weeks). This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community. During extended class suspensions, cancel extracurricular group activities and large events. Remember to implement strategies to ensure the continuity of education, research, and housing as well as meal programs and other essential services for students.

## **WHAT SHOULD WE DO IF A STUDENT, STAFF OR FACULTY MEMBER SHOWS SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?**

You should establish procedures for anyone who becomes sick or arrives sick on campus. Sick students, staff and faculty should be separated from others, given a mask to wear, if available and sent to their place or residence as soon as possible. Sick residents of on-campus housing should avoid contact with individuals who are healthy.

## **WHAT SHOULD WE DO IF WE HAVE A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19 ON CAMPUS OR IDENTIFY SOMEONE WHO WAS ON CAMPUS?**

Immediately notify local health officials. These officials will help administrators determine a course of action for your college or university.

Administrators should work closely with their local health officials to determine if a short-term closure (for 2-5 days) of all campus buildings and facilities is needed. In some cases, you may only need to close buildings and facilities that had been entered by the individual(s) with COVID-19. This initial short-term class suspension and event and activity (e.g., club meetings; on-campus sport, theater, and music events) cancellation allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation and for custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facilities. It also allows the local health officials and administrators to determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.

## Dismissals

### WHEN SHOULD I SUSPEND CLASSES OR CANCEL EVENTS/ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS?

Any decision about school dismissal or cancellation of events should be made in coordination with your local health officials. Colleges and universities are not expected to make decisions about dismissals on their own.

You may need to temporarily dismiss school for 2-5 days, if someone with COVID-19 was on campus. COVID-19. This initial short-term dismissal allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the school and for custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facilities. Work with the local health officials to determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended dismissal duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.

If there is substantial transmission in the local community, local health officials may suggest extended school dismissals. This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, dismissal strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community.

### HOW LONG SHOULD COLLEGES OR UNIVERSITIES BE DISMISSED?

It depends on the situation at your school and community. You may need to temporarily dismiss school for 2-5 days, if someone with COVID-19 was on campus. This initial short-term dismissal allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the school and for custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facilities. The need for an extended dismissal will be made based on what officials discover from contact tracing.

If there is substantial transmission in the local community, local health officials may suggest extended school dismissals. This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, dismissal strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community.

### SHOULD WE CONTINUE TEACHING AND/OR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IF WE DECIDE TO DISMISS CLASSES?

Yes, consider ways that your college/university can adapt or use alternative teaching methods.

- 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.
- Institutes of higher education should 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.

## SHOULD WE TEMPORARILY CANCEL EXTRACURRICULAR GROUP ACTIVITIES AND LARGE EVENTS?

If your community has cases of COVID-19, work with your local public health officials to determine if you should [temporarily cancel events](#).

If you decide to dismiss classes, you should also cancel extracurricular group activities and large events, such as club meetings, performances, social events, athletic team practices, and sporting events. You should also discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering or socializing elsewhere.

## IF CLASSES ARE DISMISSED, HOW SHOULD WE DECIDE WHEN TO RE-OPEN THE CAMPUS?

Schools should work with local health officials to assess when students, staff and faculty can return to campus.

## Recent Travel

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO IF A STUDENT OR STAFF MEMBER RECENTLY TRAVELED TO AN AREA WITH COVID-19 OR HAS A FAMILY MEMBER WHO HAS TRAVELED TO AN AREA WITH COVID-19?

Review updated [CDC information for travelers](#), including [FAQ for travelers](#), and consult with state and local health officials. Health officials may use CDC's [Interim US Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Persons with Potential Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Exposures: Geographic Risk and Contacts of Laboratory-confirmed Cases](#) to make recommendations. Individuals returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials.