

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: Department of Education Issues Guidance for School Districts on COVID-19

03/6/2020

From the New Jersey Department of Education:



(<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy>)

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) this week announced that it has issued guidance (<https://www.nj.gov/education/broadcasts/2020/mar/05/Guidance%20Regarding%20Requirements%20for%20Public%20Health-Related%20School%20Closure.pdf>) to school districts related to the current outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

While the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in New Jersey remains low, the NJDOE has issued guidance to increase flexibility for districts to provide home instruction in the event of mandated public health school closures related to COVID-19. Home instruction may include online instruction or through a contract with a neighboring school district.

The guidance provides that “any day in which students impacted by a public health-related closure have access to home instruction services provided consistent with the guidance will count as a day in which the board of education has provided public school facilities toward its compliance with the 180-day requirement.” These public health-related closures of schools would be instituted following a written directive by either the New Jersey Department of Health or the health officer of the jurisdiction.

Given the evolving nature of this conversation statewide, Governor Phil Murphy, Education Commissioner Lamont O. Repollet, and Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli held a conference call with several hundred public and private school superintendents this week. Commissioner Repollet also met with school superintendents on Thursday afternoon to discuss school preparedness and planning in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

The NJDOE is asking each school district to develop a preparedness plan for the provision of home instruction to students in the event of a closure. The preparedness plan should also address the provision of appropriate special education and other services to students with disabilities and the provision of school nutrition benefits or services to eligible students.

While there are no immediate plans to implement such a system, health officials may also call for a tiered system of social distancing in schools, possibly limiting certain functions such as sports events and assemblies in order to limit the risk of exposure.

If a student or staff member is suspected to have been exposed to COVID-19, the chief school administrator or authorized designee should immediately contact local health officials to discuss the appropriate response, including possible dismissal of students or temporary closure.

“Our county offices of education are our boots on the ground. I am maintaining frequent direct contact with our Executive County Superintendents, so we ask that districts direct their questions to our county offices of education (<https://www.nj.gov/education/about/counties/>). The better we communicate, the more efficiently we can disseminate factual and timely information,” said **Commissioner Repollet, adding**, “we must also do our part to combat infectious disease-related stigmas toward specific populations or nationalities. Bullying and harassment hurt everyone and we should all recommit to combating the spread of fear and misinformation about COVID-19.”

This week, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), published additional guidance for childcare agencies and K-12 schools. The guidance is designed to address concerns among childcare centers, school administrators, athletic coaches, teachers, and parents regarding the impact that COVID-19 may have on their communities. More information can be found on the NJDOH website (<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>).

Schools and communities are encouraged to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommendations to prevent the spread of the flu and the common cold, as well as COVID-19. These recommendations include frequently washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available; avoiding contact with your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands; avoiding contact with people who are sick; staying home when you are sick and avoiding contact with others; covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing; and routinely cleaning frequently touched objects and surfaces.



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