



**Department of
Education**

Chancellor Richard A. Carranza

March 3, 2020

Dear Families,

Over the weekend, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene confirmed the first case of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City. While we all hoped this moment would not come, it was something the City has meticulously prepared for. At this time, it is important to listen to facts and not respond to fear. Despite our first confirmed case, New Yorkers remain at low risk for contracting the virus.

The health and safety of all of New York City students continues to be our first priority. As we monitor the situation, we are enhancing certain protocols and providing additional resources to schools within our buildings, including charter schools, such as providing CDC-approved cleaning agents and ensuring all bathrooms are continuously stocked with soap and paper towels. We are also keeping all of our latest information on our website at schools.nyc.gov/coronavirus.

As a reminder, it is critical that all New Yorkers continue to practice general viral infection prevention measures including:

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or sleeve
- Wash your hands regularly
- Avoid touching your face
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Get your flu shot – it's never too late
- Stay home if you're feeling sick. Call your doctor and let them know your symptoms and travel history.

We are in communication with charter school leaders to ensure they have the latest information and to support with questions that may arise.

Please read the [Frequently Asked Questions sheet](#) attached to this letter for more information, or visit nyc.gov/coronavirus at any time for important updates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard A. Carranza".

Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) for NYC Schools and Families

Know the Facts

See the answers below to common questions about the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to get accurate information and help guard against stigma and fear. When learning about COVID-19, pay attention to the source of information, particularly if it comes from unverified online sources or social media, as these sources are sometimes *not* based on science and may also be culturally offensive. For accurate, up-to-date information on COVID-19, see #6 below.

Background

- 1. What are novel coronaviruses?** Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that commonly circulate throughout the world. They cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses like pneumonia. A novel (new) coronavirus is a type of coronavirus that has not been previously found in humans.
- 2. What is COVID-19?** The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a coronavirus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness (which affects breathing) first detected in Wuhan, China. Infections with this new virus have been reported in other regions of China and in some travelers from Wuhan to other countries, including the U.S.
- 3. How serious is COVID-19 and what are the range of symptoms?** Reported illnesses due to infection with COVID-19 have ranged from mild to severe. Symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. While many patients have had mild illnesses, some patients have been hospitalized and deaths have been reported in other countries.
- 4. How does this virus spread?** Much is still unknown about how COVID-19 spreads. Current information suggests that person-to-person spread is occurring, although it is not clear how easily the virus spreads between people. Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory illnesses spread.
- 5. How many days does it take to get sick from the virus after exposure?** This period is called the incubation period. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believes at this time that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear between 2 and 14 days after exposure. This estimated range is based on the incubation period of previously studied coronaviruses.
- 6. Where can I learn the latest information?**
To learn the most up-to-date information, visit:
 - cdc.gov/coronavirus or call the CDC Health Line at 1-800-232-4636
 - nyc.gov/health/coronavirus or call 311 (interpretation and translation services are available)

Guidance for schools regarding people returning from mainland China

- 1. Should all people returning from mainland China with cold or flu-like symptoms be tested for COVID-19 infection?** No. Laboratory testing for COVID-19 infection will only be done when an ill traveler meets ALL of the CDC criteria for Persons Under Investigation (PUI) for COVID-19:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/COVID-19/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>. (Or go to cdc.gov/coronavirus and

navigate to Healthcare Professionals → Evaluating and Reporting PUI.) Providers in New York City should first consult with the NYC Health Department for testing approval.

2. **What happens when people who have been in mainland China return to the United States by air travel?** All people who spent time in mainland China within 14 days before arriving in the United States land at one of eleven airports in the country. JFK and Newark are two of these airports. In the airport they are asked questions about their travel and whether they have been in contact with anyone with COVID-19 by Federal officials. They also have their temperature taken and are asked about their health. People who have been in Hubei Province, China, or are sick, are not allowed to continue to their final destinations. Sick persons are referred to medical facilities and persons without symptoms are transported to local quarantine areas where they will stay and be monitored for up to 14 days depending on their last day in Hubei Province. If they have not been in Hubei Province, have no symptoms and they departed China on or after 5pm Eastern Time on February 2, 2020, they are given information about self-monitoring for symptoms and staying home from work and school and they are allowed to continue to their final destinations. The local health department at their final destination is also notified and will contact them to instruct them on self-monitoring and other recommendations.
3. **What should people who have returned from mainland China (other than Hubei province) do?** In the federal government guidance, people who left mainland China on or after 5pm Eastern Time on February 2, 2020 and who spent time in mainland China (other than Hubei province) within the previous 14 days are recommended to:
 - Self-monitor their temperature and symptoms for 14 days after they left China. This means they should take their temperature twice a day and watch for cough or difficulty breathing.
 - The 14-day self-monitoring period begins the day they left mainland China, even if they spent time in another country between leaving China and arriving in the United States.
 - Practice social distancing. Social distancing includes staying home from school and work and remaining out of public places and gatherings.The local health department will contact these people to provide recommendations, remind them to monitor their health, and help them get medical care if they become ill.
4. **Who does the above guidance apply to?** Currently, this guidance applies **only** to people who left mainland China (excluding Hong Kong and Macau) on or after 5 p.m. Eastern Time on February 2, 2020.
5. **What about people who left China before 5 p.m. Eastern Time on February 2, 2020?** Travelers who left mainland China before 5 p.m. Eastern Time on February 2, 2020 have no self-monitoring period. They can be at school and work during this time, as the guidance for staying home does not apply to them per the federal directive.
6. **What about families of people who have been in mainland China but who themselves have not traveled?** Anyone, including family members, who were not in mainland China should continue to stay in school or go to work.
7. **What do schools do if a student who left mainland China after 5 p.m. Eastern Time on February 2, 2020 comes to school during their 14-day self-monitoring period when they are supposed to stay home?** Some families may not fully understand the instructions they receive at the airport and from the NYC Health Department. If a principal is aware that a student was asked to self-monitor and stay home from school, that principal may remind the parents of the student of the guidance and ask them to keep the student home until 14 days after they left mainland China. Principals and school staff should be sensitive in their conversations with these families. Principals should reach out to their Health Director or the Office of School Health for further support if needed.
8. **Can schools exclude students with recent travel from mainland China and no illness?** No. Although these people are asked to self-monitor and stay at home during a period of time, these families are not

given a legal order to do so. As mentioned above, if a student who should be staying home during their self-monitoring period comes to school, and the principal is aware that the student was asked to self-monitor and stay home from school, principals can remind the parents of these students of the guidance. Principals should also call their Health Directors or the Office of School Health for support if needed.

9. **Will schools be given a list of students who returned from mainland China and should not come to school?** No. Returning travelers' names and information will not be released to schools. It is up to the returning family to inform the school of a student's need to stay home.
10. **Should students with guidance from the Health Department to stay home after returning from mainland China be given an excused absence from school?** Yes.
11. **How can schools support students who need to stay home during their self-monitoring period?** Schools should make every effort to help these students keep up with their schoolwork by informing all the student's teachers and encouraging teachers to provide assignments and study material electronically or otherwise so that the student may work from home.
12. **Do people who have been to mainland China need to get cleared to return to work or school?** People with a travel history to mainland China and no symptoms can return to work or school after the up-to 14-day self-monitoring period is complete. There is no clearance process, nor is a doctor's note necessary to return to school.
13. **What should a school do if a student, teacher or staff member who was in China during the past 14 days becomes sick with fever, cough or shortness of breath?**
 - **Students:** If a student becomes ill during the school day, the student should go to the school nurse and inform the nurse of the student's travel history and symptoms. School nurses have protocols in place to work with the Health Department to assess these students. If there is no school nurse, the student should be separated from other students and staff until they can be picked up for transport home or to a medical provider. Consider having the student wear a surgical face mask while on school premises and awaiting transportation home or to a medical provider. The Health Department will make further recommendations once the student is in medical care.
 - **Staff:** The person should seek evaluation by a health professional and should not remain in school. Before visiting a medical provider or emergency room, the person should call ahead and tell them about their symptoms and recent travel. Consider having the staff member wear a surgical mask while on school premises and awaiting transportation home or to a medical provider. The Health Department will make further recommendations once the staff member is in medical care and has been evaluated.
14. **What steps can a school take to prevent respiratory viruses from infecting students and teachers?** NYC is currently near the peak of influenza season. The Health Department recommends schools consider the following to prevent the spread of influenza and other respiratory viruses:
 - a. Strongly promote the annual flu shot for all students and staff — it's not too late to get the flu shot.
 - b. Adhere to existing school health protocols for any staff/student(s) presenting as ill or any staff/student(s) who may have been exposed to a contagious disease. Follow established exclusion recommendations for acute respiratory illness. (Patients should be fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications before returning to school.)
 - c. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - d. Provide adequate soap, paper towels and other cleaning supplies in bathrooms and other wash areas.