

Schools Already Planning for Coronavirus

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With quarantines and confirmed cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) [now impacting the U.S.](#), it is important that schools, colleges and universities prepare their communities for the possibility of the virus reaching campus.

Schools in particular are at an elevated risk for person-to-person spread if the virus reaches campus and should take proactive steps to both prevent the virus from reaching campus, and plan for what will happen if the virus does reach campus.

Identify a person or office to monitor guidance from public health officials and coordinate your institution's response and communication efforts. Because information is being released from various federal and state departments, this individual or office should consolidate the relevant information and create updates for distribution to the community at designated times. Providing information, including links to continuously [updated CDC recommendations](#) or [Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines](#), will be important to keep false information from spreading. Reminding the community of the current low risk of contracting the virus, the limited or lack of confirmed cases in the area, and development of a plan if the virus does become prevalent, will help address concerns. We suggest creating an interactive tab on your website containing updated relevant information in a clear and concise manner.

Create a plan for students, faculty and visitors who may have traveled to mainland China or been in close contact with someone who has. Currently, the virus is believed to have a 2-to 14-day incubation period and person-to-person spread of the virus is believed to be happening in 3 ways:

- Individuals with close contact to someone with the virus
- Respiratory droplets from infected individuals landing in mouths or noses and possibly being inhaled in to the lungs
- Contact with infected surfaces or objects and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes

Because self-quarantine may become prevalent in case of a pandemic, schools should prepare alternative options for attendance and remain flexible with options such as teleworking, online assignments and recorded classes.

Colleges and universities, specifically, should consider supports for self-quarantine, including providing housing, food and academic accommodations during the two-week period. Currently, there is no need to broadly cancel classes or scheduled events because the vast majority of Americans are at lower risk of exposure.

Place a ban on approval of students, faculty and staff traveling to midland China on school business or as part of a school-sponsored program until at least March 23, but possibly longer. Schools should also strongly recommend leisure travel to this area be deferred for the foreseeable future.

Provide guidance for students who may be traveling abroad in China or other countries with

significant numbers of confirmed COVID-19 infections. It is important to provide necessary information on seeking medical assistance if traveling students happen to come in contact with the virus while they're abroad. These students should be reminded of the limitations and realities of obtaining medical treatment abroad and be advised about certain obstacles they may encounter. Students should also be reminded of the necessary steps to avoid obvious risks of contracting the virus, and should be provided with the contact information for local emergency, point of contact for safety and the local hospital. These students should also be provided with the risk assessment and encouraged to obtain student health insurance and stay privy to local health alerts.

Be prepared to handle discrimination and targeting of individuals on campus. The media often covers any and all information that is released concerning novel viruses, which can lead to misinformation and misunderstanding about the risks. This already has led to targeting and exclusion of Chinese, perceived Chinese and individuals recently returning from China. The school should remind the community that it will not stand for harassment, bias or discrimination. The school should also remind the community that just because an individual is wearing a medical mask does not mean the individual poses any infection risk, wearing a mask is a common preventative measure.

Although the risk of widespread person-to-person spread of COVID-19 in the United States at this time is believed to be low, it is important for schools, colleges, and universities to be prepared for the possibility and keep their community apprised of efforts to take appropriate action if the virus reaches campus.

If you have questions on how your educational entity should be planning for coronavirus, please contact any of the attorneys in the [Barley Snyder Education Practice Group](#).

For our earlier coronavirus alert concerning what businesses should be doing right now to prepare, [click here](#).

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