

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, MD, JD, COMMISSIONER

SHANNON L. TAHOE, COMMISSIONER

February 5, 2020

Dear School Administrators:

Recently, a new coronavirus called 2019 Novel (new) Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China that has not been previously found in humans. This coronavirus can lead to fever, cough and shortness of breath. There are thousands of confirmed cases in China, including cases outside of Wuhan. Additional cases are being identified in a growing number of countries, including the United States.

This letter is to provide guidance to schools in light of this new virus as well as federal guidance recently issued from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Schools should share this information with their school nurses and directors of school health services (aka medical directors).

**At this time, there are no cases in New York State. The risk to residents and students is low.** At this time of the year, there are many possible causes for respiratory illness. Therefore, there is no need to cancel school or social events, and there is no need for students or school staff to wear surgical masks at school.

As a reminder, all student health information is confidential and may only be shared in accordance with FERPA. Students should not be excluded from school or any school activities based on race, country of origin, or recent travel, including to any part of China.

**Q. Are visitors from China being screened?**

A. Yes. On January 31, 2020, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II declared a public health emergency (PHE) for the United States. Also, on January 31, the President of the United States (US) signed a presidential “Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Persons who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus.” As part of this action, new screening protocols are effective for individuals entering the US from China at designated airports.

**Q. Can people who visited China and returned on or after February 2, 2020 return to school and/or work?**

A. Yes, people who visited China and returned after February 2, 2020 can return to school or work, unless a local health department informs the school that a student or staff must comply with a quarantine order.

As directed by the Presidential Proclamation, students and staff who have returned to the US on or after February 2, 2020, may be subject to quarantine by a local health department that prevents them from attending school and/or work. Such movement restrictions will be in effect for a total of 14 days after leaving China. Notice of these passengers is being sent to local health departments, which are responsible for the monitoring and movement restrictions necessary to prevent spread of this virus. The local health department will be required to contact schools about restrictions on students and furthermore, local health departments will notify schools when students can return to school.

Absent a school receiving such direction from the local health department, students should not be excluded from school or any school activities based on recent travel.

If a person who visited China and returned after February 2, 2020 and who is not subject to quarantine, develops fever and respiratory symptoms (cough or difficulty breathing), the school should advise the individual or their parent or guardian to immediately call the local health department. The local health department can assist them with determining what additional evaluation is needed and where it should take place.

Pursuant to Education Law § 906(1),

[w]henver,... a student in the public schools shows symptoms of any communicable or infectious disease reportable under the public health law that imposes a significant risk of infection of others in the school, he or she shall be excluded from the school and sent home immediately, in a safe and proper conveyance. The director of school health services shall immediately notify a local public health agency of any disease reportable under the public health law.

In addition, effective February 1, 2020, the 2019-Novel Coronavirus was added to Public Health Law as a significant threat to the public health, and NYS Commissioner of Health designated 2019-Novel Coronavirus as a communicable disease under 10 NYCRR Section 2.1.

**If a local health department informs the school that a student must comply with a quarantine order, but the child shows up to school, the school should contact the local health department immediately.**

If school staff or health services professionals have questions relating to 2019-nCoV and the impact on students who may have travelled to China, they should contact their local health department.

**Q. Can students who traveled to China before February 2, 2020 attend school?**

A. Yes, students who visited China and returned before February 2, 2020 should return to school, unless a local health department informs the school that a student must comply with a quarantine order.

If a student who has traveled in the last 14 days to areas [designated by CDC](#) as areas of risk for 2019-nCoV, AND they develop fever and respiratory symptoms (cough or difficulty breathing), the school should advise the parent or guardian to immediately call the local health department. The local health department can assist the family with determining what additional evaluation is needed and where it should take place.

Pursuant to Education Law § 906(1),

[w]henever, . . . a student in the public schools shows symptoms of any communicable or infectious disease reportable under the public health law that imposes a significant risk of infection of others in the school, he or she shall be excluded from the school and sent home immediately, in a safe and proper conveyance. The director of school health services shall immediately notify a local public health agency of any disease reportable under the public health law.

In addition, effective February 1, 2020, the 2019- Novel Coronavirus was added to Public Health Law as a significant threat to the public health, and NYS Commissioner of Health designated 2019- Novel Coronavirus as a communicable disease under 10 NYCRR Section 2.1.

**If a local health department informs the school that a student must comply with a quarantine order, but the child shows up to school, the school should contact the local health department immediately.**

**Q. Should any action be taken with respect to a student whose family member has recently traveled to China?**

A. No. There are currently no recommendations for any restriction of an individual who has not recently traveled to China, including family members. If schools have questions about symptomology or 2019-nCoV, the local department of health should be contacted.

**Q. What steps do I need to take to support students' educational needs?**

The Education Department strongly encourages all schools to send classroom work to students who have monitoring and movement restrictions in place due to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus. This can be done electronically or mailed to the student's home.

Schools are asked to encourage their medical directors to sign up for the NYS Center for School Health's medical directors' list serve in order to access up to date resources and information: 585-617-2380 or [nysch@monroe2boces.org](mailto:nysch@monroe2boces.org)

### **Additional Resources**

This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. We encourage you to keep up to date about 2019-nCoV, its treatment and prevention by visiting the following websites:

CDC's dedicated 2019-nCoV website at <https://www.cdc.gov/nCoV>.

NYSDOH's dedicated 2019-nCoV website at:

<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

In addition, NYS has established a Novel Coronavirus Hotline, which can provide additional information. Call 1-888-364-3065 with Questions or Concerns About Travel and Symptoms.

Contact information for your local Department of Health may be found at

[https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/)

Attached is a template letter that may be used by Districts to inform parents about the 2019-nCoV.

Thank you for your continued partnership in this ever-changing situation. Your leadership is critical to ensure accurate information is given to parents, families, and communities around the state.

Sincerely,



Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.  
Commissioner of Health



Shannon L. Tahoe  
State Education Commissioner

Dear Parent/Guardian,

A new coronavirus called 2019 Novel (new) Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was first found in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This virus had not been found in humans before. This coronavirus can lead to fever, cough and trouble breathing or shortness of breath. There are thousands of diagnosed cases in China and new cases being diagnosed in a number of countries including the United States.

### **What do we know?**

Since this virus is very new, health authorities continue to carefully watch how this virus spreads. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working hard to learn as much as possible about this new virus, so that we can better understand how it spreads and causes illness. The CDC considers this virus to be a serious public health concern. Based on current information the CDC recommends avoiding travel to China. Updated travel information related to 2019-nCoV can be found at

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-china>

### **How Does 2019 Novel (New) Coronavirus Spread?**

Health experts believe the virus probably spreads from animals to humans and from person to person. It's not clear yet how easily the virus spreads from person-to-person.

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is not currently a concern for the general public and is not actively circulating among New Yorkers at this time. Therefore, there is no need to cancel school or social events, and there is no need for students or school staff to wear surgical masks at school.

### **Prevention**

There are currently no vaccines available to protect against this virus. The New York State Department of Health (DOH) recommends the following ways to minimize the spread of all respiratory viruses, including 2019-nCoV:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. If you use a tissue, throw it in the trash.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- CDC recommends that travelers avoid all travel to China.

### **Symptoms**

Information to date suggests that 2019-nCoV causes mild-to-moderate illness and symptoms like the flu, including fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

### **Are visitors from China being screened?**

Yes, as of February 2<sup>nd</sup> new screening protocols are conducted for individuals entering the US from China at designated airports.

PreK-12 schools may have students who attend school and have traveled to various areas in Asia, including China. Students should not be excluded from school or any school activities based on race, country of origin, or recent travel (or a family member's recent travel), including to any part of China. Schools may only exclude a student if a local health department informs the school that a student must comply with a quarantine order or the student is symptomatic of a communicable or infectious disease pursuant to Education Law §906.

### **Important Health Information for Those Who Have Recently Traveled to Wuhan, Hubei Province, China and Experience Symptoms**

If you recently traveled to Wuhan, China and feel sick with fever, cough or trouble breathing; OR you develop symptoms within 14 days of traveling there, you should:

- Seek medical care right away. Call ahead and tell them about your travel and symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Stay home, except for seeking medical care.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Contact your local health department.

This is an emerging, rapidly changing situation. For questions please contact your local department of health or the NYS DOH Novel Coronavirus hotline at **1-888-364-3065**.

We encourage you to keep up to date about 2019-nCoV, its treatment and prevention by visiting the following websites:

### **Additional Resources**

CDC's dedicated 2019-nCoV website at <https://www.cdc.gov/nCoV>.

NYSDOH's dedicated 2019-nCoV website at <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

NYSDOH directory of local health departments  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/)

[New York State Center for School Health website at www.schoolhealthny.com](http://www.schoolhealthny.com)