



Elmira City School District

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Frequently Asked School Questions and Answers | COVID-19 Contingency Planning

The New York State Department of Health COVID-19 hotline number is 1-888-364-3065. It is the goal of the Elmira City School District to communicate often and effectively. The Elmira City School District has set-up an email address specific to COVID-19 questions for parents, staff, and community members seeking further information. Please reach out by email at covid19@elmiracityschools.com.

Where we are now? *As of March 13, 2020* - The Elmira City School District will remain in regular communication with the Chemung County Health Department, the New York State Department of Health and the New York State Education Department. Decisions regarding the status of COVID-19 in our county and subsequent contingency planning for schools will be guided by the above listed local and state organizations. The Central Office Administration Team at the Elmira City School District is undertaking planning in the following ways:

- reviewing, revising, and implementing our Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs);
- staying in close communication with the Chemung County Health Department;
- collaborative planning with other area school districts;
- monitoring and planning for student and staff absences;
- continuing our current procedures for students and staff who are sick at school (schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19);
- continuing our cleaning protocols, and prioritizing the disinfecting of high-touch areas;
- encouraging students and staff to wash their hands and to utilize hand sanitizer when unable to wash their hands; and
- working to communicate often and through the various channels available to the district. Please reach out by email at covid19@elmiracityschools.com with questions or for more information.

Is the Elmira City School District closing? There is no pending plan to close schools as of Friday March 13, 2020 as directed by New York State local and state officials. The District Administration Team has developed a contingency plan for a variety of scenarios in the event of a school closure. Schools are not expected to make decisions about closing or canceling events due to COVID-19 on their own. Schools are anticipating specific guidance from the State or local health officials to determine next steps.

Will Events and Activities, School-Sponsored and Outside Agencies Building Use, Continue in School Buildings? Our planning focus continues to be on events and activities from now through Spring Break. Based on the guidance we have received, the following cancellations and postponements have been made. This list will be updated with additional information by Monday, March 16th:

- No Field Trips Until Further Notice
- No Staff or Student Travel to Off-Campus Professional Development or Conferences Until Further Notice
- All fine and performing arts events are cancelled through April 14th
- All Spring Athletics may PRACTICE ONLY. (No formal events or scrimmages until further guidance)
- All Outside Organizations are now PROHIBITED from using the school facilities Until Further Notice
- Junior Prom - postponed
- Hendy Craft Show - postponed

Travel and Trips – As of Friday, March 13, 2020, school-sponsored travel, including field trips, will be discontinued until further notice. BOCES educational programming will continue as part of the regular school day. The District will adhere to all governance from the New York State Department of Health regarding travel.

Who can close schools? The decision to close schools will be based on direction provided to the District by local and state officials. This situation differs from a situation like a snow day, in which the Superintendent makes the decision solely. In this case, a school closure decision is made with direction from local health departments, county emergency managers, as well as any emergency declarations issued by the Governor. Public officials understandably don't want to close schools unless they absolutely have to, and many closures so far have been triggered by a known case of infection or exposure among staff or students.

If the District closes for an extended time, will families have access to food? –The Elmira City School District will ensure the continuity of meal programs for our students. If a school closure becomes imminent, further details will be announced regarding food distribution.

What is the Coronavirus, now called COVID-19? The Coronavirus is a respiratory virus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing mild to moderate respiratory tract illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently tracking a new strain, the “2019 Novel Coronavirus” (2019-nCoV) or COVID-19.

What is the role of schools in responding to COVID-19?

It is important, especially as an educational institution, that our reaction to and preparation for COVID-19 be informed, logical, and proportionate to the risk. Schools, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure students have safe and healthy learning environments.

What preventative measures is the Elmira City School District undertaking regarding the spread of illness? Schools are taking action to reduce the spread of any virus – whether it is the flu virus or COVID-19 -- by promoting good hygiene and respiratory etiquette. We encourage students and staff to take everyday preventive actions to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, such as staying home when sick, appropriately covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and washing hands often with soap and water.

To prepare for possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for schools to do now is plan and prepare. As the global outbreak evolves, schools want to be ready if COVID-19 does appear in their communities.

Schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19. The majority of respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19. If a community (or more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and follow up on next steps.

What is the role of parents and caregivers in responding to COVID-19?

It is essential that students stay home when they are sick. Frequently reported signs and symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, muscle pain or fatigue, and shortness of breath at illness onset. Sore throat has also been reported in some patients in the early stages. Children who are getting ill may exhibit different behavior than usual, such as eating less or being irritable.

School districts in New York State are required to isolate and send home any person who presents flu-like symptoms (see FAQ below).

If you suspect your child is sick, it is essential that he/she/they not attend school or go anywhere else—such as childcare centers, the mall, or sporting events—where other people would be exposed. Parents and caregivers should also teach their children these everyday measures that help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases:

Wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds (about as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice). Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.

Use hand sanitizer appropriately. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer.

Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.

Are there any new procedures in place if an individual presents with flu-like symptoms?

As of the evening of March 9, 2020, the New York State Department of Health and New York State Education Department issued guidance that requires schools to separate staff and students who present flu-like symptoms at school. Students and staff who appear to have a flu-like illness when they come to school—or who become ill during the school day— should be isolated in a room separate from other people if possible, or kept a minimum of 6 feet away from others while wearing a surgical mask until they can be sent home in accordance with district procedures.

People may experience some or all of the following flu-like symptoms are:

- fever or feeling feverish/chills
- cough
- fatigue (tiredness)
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches

What can I do personally to avoid spreading illness?

CDC has developed recommended actions for preventing the spread of flu in educational settings. We highly recommend exercising non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) are actions, apart from getting vaccinated and/or taking medicine, that organizations can take to help slow the spread of illnesses.

A number of NPIs are part of our policies and regular operating procedures, such as contacting parents to pick up ill children and keeping them at home for a recommended time period, providing hand washing and respiratory etiquette education, and limiting large gatherings.

To whom, how and where are we communicating? Elmira City School District administrators are in regular communication with local public health officials to obtain up-to-date guidance about the virus in and around Chemung County.

Elmira City School District Superintendent Hillary Austin will continue to issue updates to district staff and families. In order to make it easier for staff and families to access the latest information, the District has dedicated a spot on the website for easy access. The link is as follows: <https://www.elmiracityschools.com/community/covid-19>.

What if someone comes to school and then begins to show flu-like symptoms? Students and staff who appear to have a flu-like illness when they come to school – or who become ill during the school day – will be isolated in a room separate from other people if possible, or kept a minimum of six feet away from others until they can be sent home in accordance with district procedures.

How will the school record my student absence? We will continue to record student absences for any reason under the category of excused or unexcused as dictated by the state regulations as normal. This system will not change unless otherwise directed by the New York State Education Department.

During this period of time, guidance from New York State Department of Health, Chemung County Health Department, as well as CDC advocates for schools to advise students that are feeling ill to stay home. Due to

this recommendation and the state's guidance for reporting school absences, parents and/or guardians will continue receiving automated phone calls at home. This practice will keep us compliant with state regulations and reporting guidelines.)

How long may a school be closed if a staff member or student is diagnosed with COVID-19? If a student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as COVID-19 case, local health officials will require an immediate 24-hour closure to disinfect the entire school building, including all buses, while local health officials begin an investigation to determine contacts the positive case had, and set forth a plan for the containment strategy, including appropriate length of closure for the school. The length will be determined by the Department of Health.