



Arkansas Department of Education

Johnny Key, Commissioner

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Commissioner's Memo
3/2/2020 1

Guidance for Schools Regarding COVID-19

Memo Information

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Memo Type Informational

Unit Learning Services

Regulatory Authority

Response Required NO

Attention Federal Programs; Superintendents; Assistant Superintendent; Principals; Technology Coordinators; Test Coordinators; General Business Managers; Teachers; Gifted & Talented Coordinators; Curriculum Coordinators; Bookkeepers; School Counselors; Techstart Coordinators or Contact Name; Equity Coordinators (Disability/Race/Gender/National Origin); Child Nutrition Directors/Managers; Data Stewards (SIS; eSchool; eFinance; TRIAND); District Coordinators (ALE; Homeless; ESOL; SDFS & Foster); Parent Involvement Coordinators/Facilitators

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Memo Reference

No references available.

Memo Text

Updates to COVID-19 GUIDANCE (UPDATED 3-13-2020)

Gov. Asa Hutchinson held a press conference today and provided an update about COVID-19. The video of the press conference is available at <https://bit.ly/39Pd5VF>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations on school closures. These recommendations, which are available at the following link, are based on science, reports, and by consulting with school health experts: <https://bit.ly/39QxCci>.

Updated Contact Information

In an effort to effectively field concerns related to school closures and school/student-related concerns of potential positive COVID-19 cases, the Arkansas Department of Health has designated a hotline for school personnel to utilize to report concerns. Additionally, Arkansas Children's Hospital has designated a hotline number to field concerns related specifically to the known presumptive positive case at ACH mentioned in the March 12 press conference. For all other concerns, individuals should use the MAIN COVID-19 Hotline number. These pertinent numbers are listed below:

School Designated COVID-19 Hotline: 1-833-504-0155

Arkansas Children's Hospital Hotline: 1-800-743-3616

MAIN COVID-19 Hotline: 1-800-803-7847

Districts can email education questions to ade.communications@arkansas.gov.

Updates to COVID-19 GUIDANCE (UPDATED 3-12-2020)

Due to the growing number of presumptive positive COVID-19 cases, as well as a continued increase in the number of people who have come in direct contact with those who have the virus, the Arkansas Department of Health, in coordination with the Arkansas Department of Education, is closing all public schools in Grant, Jefferson, Pulaski, and Saline Counties. As of today (3-12-20), only schools in these four counties are being closed because of COVID-19.

Schools in these counties began dismissing students today and will remain closed until March 30. Schools have the option of utilizing Alternative Methods of Instruction, as well as determining the appropriate number of staff needed to ensure essential school functions (such as payroll, AMI days, etc.), are addressed. Schools also are asked to limit exposure by postponing all extracurricular activities. During this time, there are no restrictions to the number of consecutive days for which AMI can be used.

To ensure students continue to have access to nutritious meals during the closure, the Arkansas Department of Education has applied for two U.S. Department of Agriculture waivers that would allow the state to approve a school's request to utilize the waivers to continue to provide meals for students during the closure. To learn more, go to <https://bit.ly/2Qar9RM>. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

The Arkansas Department of Health has been designated as the lead agency in coordinating information and response to the virus. ADH has established a dedicated phone line for school officials to call with questions: (833) 504-0155. The phone line is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. For urgent after-hours needs or on weekends, call (800) 803-7847.

ADE will continue to provide updates as more information is available. Be sure to also follow the department on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Updates to COVID-19 GUIDANCE (UPDATED 3-11-2020)

Governor Hutchinson held a press conference this morning and released a proclamation that details action to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The proclamation can be accessed [here](#). Because Arkansas has been planning a COVID-19 response for months, the state is well-positioned to begin containment efforts. The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) will continue to act as the lead agency to work in concert with other state agencies to respond to the COVID-19 virus.

School and school activities will continue at this time, and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), in consultation with the Arkansas Department of Health, shall provide guidance to local school districts and institutions of higher education to address concerns related to the virus and take all actions necessary to ensure the continuation of education. The Secretary of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, shall have sole authority to close public school campuses throughout the state for reasons related to COVID-19. The situation will be monitored closely.

Planning

Should extended closures become necessary, the ADE understands the importance of coordination in planning and responding to needs and will provide as much guidance as possible in how closures should be conducted, including the handling of student and staff absences. The ADE is working with federal agencies and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to identify issues that will need to be addressed if school closures become necessary, such as possible modifications to state testing windows and continuation of meals for students in need.

It is also important to note that The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has extended all approved 2019-2020 Alternate Methods of Instruction (AMI) applications for up to ten days.

Travel

State employees have been directed to clear their professional out-of-state travel plans with their Department's Secretary. All citizens are asked, however, to review and rethink travel plans to consider whether plans will put themselves or others at higher risk of transmission. School districts should evaluate school-sponsored travel plans and ask school-district employees to consider risks associated with their personal travel plans, including spring break.

New Resource for Arkansas

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) is pleased to announce that UAMS HealthNow, its 24-hour digital connection to healthcare professionals, will soon offer free screenings for all Arkansans who have questions about whether they may have the COVID-19 virus. UAMS HealthNow site will have a screening tool with a series of questions about their symptoms, age, overall health, travel and other potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus and guide them regarding next steps, if any. This may include a video session with a UAMS HealthNow provider, advice to contact their local physician for further evaluation and possible testing for the virus.

People who have symptoms and who have been exposed to COVID-19 are urged not to visit a physician office, urgent care clinic, emergency room or hospital without first talking to the facility and getting instructions on how to prevent spreading the virus to healthcare providers and other patients.

This service will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to patients of all ages across the state of Arkansas and can be accessed from a smart phone, tablet, laptop, or computer. <https://uamshealth.com/healthnow/>

General Information and Guidance for Schools-Novel Coronavirus (ISSUED 3-3-2020)

While currently there are no confirmed cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Arkansas, we recognize the importance of planning and communication to ensure the safety of all Arkansans. Because we share a primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of Arkansas students, the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) would like to provide guidance with the respiratory illness by COVID-19.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus identified in humans this last December (2019).

The **Arkansas Department of Health** has been designated as the lead agency in coordinating information and response to COVID-19. Information can be accessed

at: <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus>

Please review the detailed guidance from ADH, which is attached to this memo.

Guidance about Students and Staff Who Have Traveled or Possibly Been Exposed to COVID-19

At present ADH are monitoring travelers who have returned within the last 14 days from countries with sustained community transmission. At present these are the affected countries: China, South Korea, Italy, Iran, and Japan. As the epidemic spreads, we will likely also monitor travelers from other affected countries. Travelers from affected countries are advised to stay at home and monitor for symptoms until 14 days have passed from their departure from that country, while limiting interaction with others. Once 14 days have passed without any symptoms of illness, CDC recommends these travelers be allowed to return to school and public activities.

It is recommended that schools communicate with parents to let them know that the district is aware of the risk of COVID-19 internationally, the district is working with ADH to identify students and staff who may have traveled from the affected countries, and district staff will collaborate with ADH if any such students or staff are identified. Districts are requested to identify any student or staff who may have departed China (or, in the future, any other affected country) within the last 14 days. This information is permitted to be shared with ADH under the public emergency rule.

Schools should inform their school nurse if any students or staff have traveled to these countries so that the nurse can advise regarding home self-quarantine and assist with self-monitoring. **Please report this information to ADH at 501-537-8969.**

If a student is identified as having traveled from China (or other affected country) in the last 14 days and has symptoms (fever, cough, and shortness of breath), they should immediately be placed in a single room and have a mask placed on them. Others in the room should wear a mask. If physical contact is required, then gown, gloves and mask should be worn. **Any suspected case (with symptoms) of COVID-19 should be reported to ADH immediately at 501-537-8969 (M-F 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM) or 1-800-554-5738 (after hours and weekends).**

Unless students and staff are found to be at risk, schools do not need to take any special precautions beyond the normal recommendations to prevent the spread of viruses in schools. To reduce the risk for getting and spreading viral respiratory infections, including the flu and the common cold, encourage them to take simple steps to help prevent COVID-19. These include:

- Staying home when they are sick.
- Frequent hand washing with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Advising persons to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Following the school's routine cleaning and disinfection program.
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Urging students and staff to get a flu shot during the flu season.
- Providing adequate supplies for good hygiene.

The DESE will continue to coordinate with other state agencies and will provide ongoing updates as new information develops. Should it become necessary, outbreaks in school districts will be managed with assistance of the local Departments of Health and/or county office of emergency management; therefore, districts should communicate with local officials to plan accordingly.

Districts should also review approved Alternative Methods of Instruction (AMI) plans and communicate with teachers, parents and community members how decisions will be made if it's determined that there is a need for Alternative Methods of Instruction. The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has extended all approved 2019-2020 AMI applications for up to ten days. In addition, DESE will accept new AMI applications for the 2019-2020 school year from districts that did not previously apply. The deadline for submission is May 1, 2020.

School nurses and school administrators will continue to receive updated guidance as the DESE has new information to share.

Health related questions regarding the information provided in this memo may be directed to Cheria McDonald, State School Nurse Consultant, at cheria.mcdonald@arkansas.gov . For all other inquiries, contact Don Kaminar at John.Kaminar@arkansas.gov.

Attachments

- [LetterCovid19-2.28.20final_082832.pdf](#)