



March 5, 2020

Dear IDHS Partner Organizations,

The health, safety, and well-being of all those we serve are amongst our highest priorities at IDHS. With recent developments regarding COVID-19 (the 2019 novel Coronavirus), we want to take a moment to reinforce best-practice preventative safety measures and reference our process and procedures to keep our partners healthy.

First, it is important to remember that at this time, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are 100 confirmed cases of the Coronavirus in the United States.

As an agency, we are closely monitoring the situation and are taking guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). The immediate health risk to the public in Illinois and the United States remains low. There is currently no recommendation to disrupt normal activities at work or at home.

We encourage IDHS partner organizations to be mindful of preventative measures that can be taken. The CDC offers some [tips on its website](#) that can be useful in preventing many types of illnesses, including the flu.

In addition, please remember that if you are sick, you should not be at work. Anyone should be fever-free for 24 hours before returning to work after an illness. Staying home when staff are sick is one of the critical pieces of workplace illness prevention.

Proactive Steps to Stay Healthy

The 2019 novel Coronavirus is believed to be spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes, much in the way influenza, and other respiratory viruses spread. Because of this, individuals are encouraged to follow these common-sense practices:

- Wash hands regularly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water.
- Avoid the touching of eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Staff are asked to stay home if they exhibit cold or flu-like symptoms.
- Cover mouth and nose with the inside of the arm or with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue away immediately. Wash hands as soon as possible afterward.

We will continue to monitor this situation closely in the days and weeks to come. Be assured that additional communications will be forthcoming, if and when situations change. We will continue to take guidance from IDPH and communicate with all IDHS partner organizations, as appropriate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your IDHS program or contract supervisor, or my office.

Additional information is available from the Illinois Department of Public Health at their [Coronavirus-2019 \(COVID-2019\) website](#), the COVID-19 Hotline at 1 (800) 889-3931.

Thank you,

Secretary Grace B. Hou

Additional information from the CDC website:

Preparedness

The Centers for Disease Control identifies universal precautions that can be undertaken by anyone who may be exposed to the Coronavirus:

There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.**
- **Stay home when you are sick.**
- **Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.**
- **Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.**

Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask:

- CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
- Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for [health workers](#) and [people who are taking care of someone in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:

Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.

Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.

Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.

Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.

Separate sick employees:

CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).



Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:

Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.

Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.

Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.

Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene. Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

Perform routine environmental cleaning:

Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:

Check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers, can be found at on the [CDC website](#).

Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.

Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).

Focus on the components, or annexes, of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks.

Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). Effective strategies build on everyday policies and practices.

Ensure the plan emphasizes common-sense preventive actions for residents, clients, and staff. For example, emphasize actions such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often.

Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

Your local health department can be a potential resource for further guidance.

Develop information-sharing systems with partners.

Information-sharing systems can be used for day-to-day reporting (on information such as changes in absenteeism) and disease surveillance efforts to detect and respond to an outbreak.

Local health officials should be a key partner in information sharing.



Monitor and plan for absenteeism.

Alert local health officials about large increases in staff absenteeism or resident or client respiratory illness, particularly if absences appear due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the “flu,” which have symptoms like symptoms of COVID-19).

Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.

Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives.

Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.

Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.

For more and ongoing information, please also reference the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>