

Downe Township School District

School Health-Related Closure
Preparedness Plan
COVID-19

Updated March 18, 2020



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INTRODUCTION

In February 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a statement advising communities to prepare for a domestic outbreak of COVID-19, a new coronavirus strand. Downe Township School (DTS) understands that our school is an essential educational and community institution that serves many members of our local population. We also acknowledge that an outbreak of any infectious illness, including COVID-19, would be detrimental to our community. To guide preparation, response, and recovery from any such potential outbreak, DTS has created this School Health-Related Closure Preparedness Plan.

This document provides information about Downe Township School District's plans and responsibilities in the event of a local or regional outbreak of COVID-19. It is intended to be supplemental to the information provided by the Cumberland County Health Department and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). For the most current information about COVID-19 or any other public health concern, please access the information provided by these public health organizations.

DTS is working closely with local, state, and national health officials to monitor ongoing developments related to the global outbreak of COVID-19. As additional information becomes available, the district will continue to communicate with families and the community.

PURPOSE

DTS's Infectious Illness Preparedness and Response Plan will serve as a resource guide for planning for, responding to, and recovering from a pandemic that may impact or is impacting our schools and communities. Unlike most other disasters or crises, a pandemic is people-centric and will require a community and people-focused response. Although this document is specifically focused on outlining the district's response to COVID-19, the same or similar strategies may be used to address any highly infectious illness that may impact our community.

The primary goals of this plan are to:

- Prevent or minimize the spread of illness while preserving, to the extent possible, the continuity of essential school and district functions.
- Continue the essential operations of Downe Township School District, when possible, in the event of increased student or staff absences due to an outbreak of a highly infectious illness.
- Ensure effective, timely, and situation-sensitive decision-making related to any outbreak that is impacting or has the potential to impact the community.
- Establish a clear communications plan that ensures that students, families, and staff receive timely and accurate information regarding illness prevention and infection control strategies as well as information about impacts to the school district and available services.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: COVID-19

The 2020 outbreak of COVID-19, commonly referred to as "coronavirus," originated in the Wuhan province of China. Symptoms of COVID-19 reportedly include mild to severe respiratory illness accompanied by fever, cough, and shortness of breath. The virus is spread person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person sneezes or coughs. The droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby, within a distance of about six feet, where the

droplets are then inhaled into the lungs. Transmission may also be possible through contact with contaminated surfaces, though this is not considered the primary method of transmission. Symptoms typically appear within two to 14 days of exposure to the virus.

Those most at risk people for contracting the virus, as of early March 2020 are those who have recently traveled to China or those who have been in close contact with people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

There are several strategies that can prevent the spread of germs and prevent the spread of this or other respiratory illnesses, including:

- Washing hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- Covering nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing
- Avoiding close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms
- Getting a flu shot if you have not gotten one this year
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects, and
- Keeping children home if they are sick or remaining home if you are sick.

If a child is sick, parents/guardians are encouraged to notify the school and share information about symptoms and whether the child has had a positive influenza or COVID-19 diagnosis. In accordance with the Family Educational Rights Protection Act, or FERPA, DTS will not identify the name, grade, or age the student(s) or staff member(s) confirmed to have tested positive for COVID19 in any communication.

DTS also follows guidelines provided by the Cumberland County Health Department, for use in evaluating whether a child or staff member is too sick to attend school for any illness. Parents/guardians and staff are encouraged to consult these guidelines.

AUTHORITIES

In the United States, the State of NJ, and Cumberland County, various public officials have authorities related to the protection of public health and safety. During an outbreak of a highly infectious illness, the United States Government, specifically the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is the national leader for communication and coordination efforts. In some instances, the United States Government may also work in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO). The US Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are responsible for:

- Identifying, appointing, and leading the national response to highly infectious illness; for enacting or modifying legislation and policies required to sustain and optimize pandemic preparedness, capacity development, and response efforts across all sectors.
- Leading national and domestic efforts to monitor and detect outbreaks while prioritizing and guiding the allocation and targeting of resources to achieve the goals outlined in the country's response.
- Providing additional resources for national pandemic preparedness, capacity development, and response measures, including supporting rapid containment of outbreaks and providing guidance to state level authorities on the use and timing of community infection control measures.

- Supporting biomedical research and development of new vaccines and medical countermeasures.
- Considering providing resources and technical assistance to countries experiencing outbreaks of the highly infectious illness.

National, state, and local authorities are charged with collaborating in highly infectious illness preparedness and response efforts. Downe Township School District cooperates with these authorities to raise awareness and take necessary actions in response to reported illness. ***DTS's response to any outbreak of COVID-19 will be guided by the recommendations of the Cumberland County Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.***

In the event of reports of an infectious illness, such as COVID-19, DTS will:

- Remain in session until advised by health local authorities of the need to close schools.
 - The Superintendent of schools has the authority to close schools for emergency reasons in accordance with applicable district policy and state law.
 - The Superintendent will work closely with all state and local officials, specifically with the Cumberland County Department of Health, to make all decisions related to possible school closure in response to an infectious illness, such as COVID-19.
 - ✦ The Director of the Cumberland County Department of Health will make a recommendation about whether to close school(s).
- Develop and deliver comprehensive communications for students, families, staff, and community members regarding the infectious illness and the district's planned response.
- The district and school nurse will continue to educate school communities about strategies for the prevention of illness including vaccinations, proper hand washing techniques, community mitigation, and social mitigation as well as any other strategies deemed necessary or appropriate for preventing illness transmission.
- School nurse and school administration will continue to utilize and update plans to be enacted in the event that a child must be sent home from school due to illness.
- Continue to collaborate with the Cumberland County Department of Health to monitor health data and update schools, staff, and families regarding potential changes that may occur or new and pertinent information related to the extent or spread of the illness.

ASSUMPTIONS

In the event of a pandemic illness that results in a public health emergency, the NJ Governor may declare a state of emergency. In the event that a state of emergency is declared, response to the outbreak will be coordinated across all levels of government, including the school district. In a state of emergency:

- All necessary agencies will collaborate and communicate
- Effective prevention and therapeutic measures, including vaccine and antiviral medications could be delayed, in short supply, or be unavailable

- Substantial public education regarding the need to target priority groups for vaccination and antiviral/antibiotic medication and the allocation of limited supplies, will be crucial to avert public panic.
- Non-pharmaceutical interventions, travel restrictions, cancellation of public events, isolation and/or quarantine may be required to slow the spread of an outbreak.
- Secondary bacterial infections, following the outbreak, may result in shortages in antibiotic supplies.
- Cumberland County Department of Health will work with health care providers to coordinate distribution of vaccines, antivirals, and other medications and/or medical supplies as necessary.
- There may be a need for alternate care sites to be used as temporary health facilities.
- Healthcare workers, firefighters, police officers, and other emergency services personnel may be at higher risk of exposure and illness than the general population, which may strain outbreak response.
- Widespread illness could increase the likelihood of sudden and potentially significant shortages of personnel in other sectors that provide critical public safety and necessary services.
- It is possible that there may be waves of illness. In the case of pandemic influenza, for example, there may be up to two months of little or no flu activity, but there may be up to 18 months where there is ongoing risk to the public.

As additional assumptions or information about COVID-19 are identified or become available, these assumptions may be updated.

PREPARATION

Preparedness includes the actions and measures taken before an event to better handle that event when it arises. In this case, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plays a significant role in ensuring that states and local health departments are prepared for public health emergencies. At the state and local levels, the NJ Department Health and the Cumberland County Department of Health collaborate with DTS to prepare the district prior to, during, and after exposure to a highly infectious illness.

Prior to or in the early stages of an outbreak or pandemic, public health officials encourage the practice of every day good health habits and implementation of non-pharmaceutical interventions to prevent and protect the population from the spread of highly infectious illness. These habits include:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- When you are sick, stay away from others to prevent passing on your illness to others.
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing with a tissue and then throw away the tissue.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer than contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
 - The [CDC](#) offers free handwashing resources to encourage proper handwashing technique and that include tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth to prevent the spread of germs. Practice other good health strategies, including cleaning and disinfecting surfaces especially when someone is ill; get plenty of sleep, manage stress, and be physically active.

In addition to these good health habits, other non-pharmaceutical interventions that can help to mitigate the spread of illness in the community include:

- Social distancing or creating ways to provide distance between people in close contact areas including at work and at school.
- Closures or cancellations of non-urgent events and avoidance of scheduling community events during an outbreak or pandemic in Cumberland County or neighboring regions.
- Being prepared and informed about the pandemic and appropriate steps to prevent the spread of illness.
- Communication with students, families, employees, and community members that informs and provides updates on the status of an outbreak or pandemic and provides information on good hygiene methods that may help mitigate the spread of illness.
- Ongoing monitoring of the outbreak or pandemic.
- Maintaining clean and disinfected environments.
- Encouraging those who are sick, including students and staff, to stay home.

As Downe Township School District continues its preparation efforts, the district is also implementing the following preparedness measures in accordance with guidance from the CDC and the Cumberland County Department of Health:

- **Planning:**
 - Reviewing, updating, and implementing emergency operations plans in collaboration with the Cumberland County Department of Health.
 - Monitoring and planning for absenteeism in schools and offices.
 - Review of attendance and sick leave policies. Encouraging students and staff to stay home when sick.
 - Identifying critical job functions and positions and planning for alternative coverage of these positions as needed.
 - Developing plans for remote learning for students and for remote work for staff in the event of extended closures.
 - ✦ Encouraging staff to prepare for potential absence or closure by preparing lesson plans ahead of time, bringing materials home as needed to allow for remote work, etc.
 - Determining what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.
 - Creating communications plans to ensure that students, families, staff, and the community receive information necessary to prepare for and respond to an outbreak.

Education and Prevention:

- Encouraging all students, families, and staff to follow the good health habits and encouraging implementation of measures that prevent the spread of illness.

- Sharing resources with families to help them understand when to keep children home. DTS will continue to share the resources published by the [CDC](#) and the Cumberland County Health Department. Information about evaluating whether students are too sick to attend school can be found in Appendix B.
- Following procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible and ensuring that sick students and staff are separated from well students and staff until they can leave.
- Performing routine environmental cleaning of schools, busses, and offices including cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (i.e. doorknobs, light switches, countertops, door frames, handicap push buttons, tabletops, backs of chairs, pencil sharpeners, keyboards, mice, monitors, portions of walls, etc.) with cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
 - ✦ In times of more prevalent illness, the Custodial department implements more rigorous cleaning and disinfectant protocols.

The district will continue to adopt and implement additional preparedness measures as they are identified.

RESPONSE

Immediate and Temporary Downe Township School/Office Closure

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, temporarily dismissing childcare programs and K-12 schools is a strategy to stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 in communities. Local health officials may recommend temporary school closures in instances where a student or staff member attended school or work prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case. In such instances, local health officials with the Cumberland County Department of Health will make recommendations related to the scope of the closure (i.e. a single school, an entire district). The duration of closures will be determined on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information available about COVID-19 and the specific case(s) in the community.

In the event of exposure within the DTS community, the following steps will be taken:

- DTS will confer with local health officials to obtain a recommendation regarding school closure, timing, scope, and duration.
- DTS will communicate the possible exposure to the community, which includes students, families, staff, and community members. In accordance with the Family Educational Rights Protection Act, or FERPA, DTS will not identify the name, grade, or age the student(s) or staff member(s) confirmed to have tested positive for COVID-19.
- DTS will communicate plans for school and office closures and event/group activity cancellations as appropriate and in as timely a fashion as possible.

If local health officials recommend closure of DTS, the following protocols will be followed:

- **Building Closure and Cleaning**
 - The school, as appropriate, will be closed beginning on the date/time determined in collaboration with local health officials.
 - The extent of closure will be determined in partnership with local health officials.

- Only identified essential personnel and building administrators will have access to school buildings during closure.
 - ✦ ***DTS will clearly communicate that staff, with the exception of those designated as essential personnel by their supervisor, and students are not to enter the school facility during a closure.***
 - ✦ ***Essential Personnel is as follows: Superintendent/Principal, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction, Custodial Staff, Cafeteria Staff, School Counselor to Provide Mental Health Services, Secretarial Staff (as needed; including Kids' Center), School Nurse (as needed), Transportation Staff will be on standby if needed. Teachers will work remotely from home and be available to students and parents as needed to support the remote education process.***
- The district will provide provisions for students who receive free/reduced lunch.
- All regularly scheduled events, including extracurricular activities, performances, etc. will be cancelled or postponed until further notice.
- Kids' Center, after school program/childcare, will be cancelled. However, School Counselor, Mr. deJong will be on premises to provide remote mental health services to students as needed. His secretary, Mrs. Moore, will be on premises as well to assist with providing support services to families as needed.
- Signs will be posted indicating playground closures for the duration of the school closure or unless otherwise determined.
- Students will be asked to take all necessary learning technology and curricular materials home with them for use in e-learning for the duration of the closure as directed by their teachers. Chromebooks will be on loan to families that need it following our district sign-out process.
- Staff will be required to take all work-related technology and tools home with them for use in support of e-learning for the duration of the closure as directed by their supervisor.
- Cleaning of affected facilities will be completed in accordance with district protocols and in accordance with recommendations from the Cumberland County Department of Health. All cleaning will be completed prior to implementation of any student or staff building re-entry.
 - ✦ Cleaning protocols in response to a closure would include removing trash and recycling from the building, vacuuming all floor surfaces, sweeping, mopping, scrubbing all desks, counters, sinks, and tabletops. Restrooms, and health office, and other offices would be cleaned and disinfected. All high-touch surfaces would be disinfected, including wiping all surfaces with using disinfectant. Surfaces with cracks or corners will be wiped and sprayed with disinfectant. All Early Childhood and kindergarten toys will be disinfected. All carpet will be sprayed with disinfectant and all kitchens, including floors, prep areas, serving tables, and equipment, and restrooms would be disinfected. Buses and child restraint devices for transportation will continue to be cleaned and disinfected as well. The district will continue to use Bioblast Disinfecting products as well as other cleaning agents deemed appropriate to kill germs.

- The Finance department has articulated a plan to ensure that payroll will be processed based on all current scheduled assignments and paid to existing direct deposit accounts.
- **Communication:** Information about the closure will be shared as soon as possible after closure determinations are made via:
 - District website;
 - Blackboard Connect phone calls and text messages to families and staff;
 - Signage on the doors at the school building;
 - Posting to Class Dojo

Information about closures will be updated daily to ensure that the community has the most current information available.

- **Continuity of Education and District Services:** In the event of a closure, the district will implement digital education plans for students and staff, where appropriate. In order to prepare for this implementation, all district families were surveyed to determine 1. Whether they have internet access at home, and 2. Whether they have a device at home to use for remote digital education. At this time, **ALL** families have internet access. Devices will be supplied for families with internet access, but who do not have access to a device for educational use and/or who have multiple children and only one device available. A remote learning “test” will be conducted in advance once the digital platform is established and ready for use.
 - ✦ All teachers will plan two week’s worth of lessons for their respective classes in preparation of a school closure. PS to grade 2 will incorporate paper-based assignments; grades 3-8 will utilize online resources for their lessons when possible.
 - ✦ All teachers will communicate lessons/assignments to families via our online platform, Class Dojo, which is used as a primary means of digital communication. Students will complete their assignments as directed by their teachers and access online resources as assigned.
 - ✦ Google Classroom will be used for grades 3-8 to assign lessons, grade student work, and provide feedback on student work.
 - ✦ Some curriculum adoptions include digital platforms to support remote student learning. Teachers will assign work via these platforms when appropriate.
 - ✦ Teachers will be accessible via Class Dojo, email, or phone to answer questions as the need arises. Arrangements can be made for phone calls for those families without access to the internet or Class Dojo.
 - ✦ Those students completing paper-based assignments will take them home to have on hand in case a closure occurs.
 - ✦ All modifications/accommodations required for students with 504 plans and/or IEPs will be made by teachers as lessons are assigned. Special education teachers will provide for these accommodations/modifications during routine lesson planning.

- ✦ Special education related services personnel will be sending home activities that students can complete at home in lieu of services. All physical therapy sessions will be made up upon return to school.
 - ✦ Each department will develop guidelines associated with expectations for staff as related to working remotely. These guidelines will be communicated to staff by their supervisors. Accessibility will be mandatory.
 - ✦ Planning for necessary technical support of e-learning and telecommute efforts via the Information Technology department.
 - ✦ Planning for ongoing maintenance of school and office buildings as needed.
 - ✦ Planning for ensuring ongoing security of school and office buildings as needed.
- **Other Considerations**
 - **Provisions for Food Service for Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch:** DTS receives breakfast and lunch from a satellite location in Lawrence Township. In case of a school closure, food will be provided to DTS students that qualify. A station will be set up at our side-door location. Parents may pull up and receive their food without having to get out of the car and/or enter the school building. We will follow our regular school procedures for cafeteria service by having families sign up in advance so appropriate food allocations are available. We will provide multiple days of food provisions to families as allowed by the USDA so that families do not have to make multiple trips to the school during the closure. Pick-up times will be from 10:00am to 12:00pm. Days for pick-up will be determined depending on the time/extent of the closure. Arrangements will be made to deliver food to families that do not have transportation. We will communicate this information to families via our school website, Class Dojo, and global telephone calls/text messages.
 - **Extended Closures:** In the event of extended school/office closures, the district is also exploring the following:
 - ✦ The potential need to modify school schedules as a result of extended closures (i.e. adding days to the end of the school year etc.).
 - ✦ The Red Cross may get involved in the event of an extended school closure. If so, this may impact food distribution to community members. More information related to the specifics of extended closures will be shared as the need for such closures are identified. Additional feeding sites within Cumberland County will be shared with families via Class Dojo and our school website.
 - **Travel:** As COVID-19 cases continue to be identified across the country and around the world, DTS will continue to evaluate whether to permit travel for field trips or school-sponsored events and/or for staff professional development.
 - ✦ As of March 12, 2020, it has been determined after consultation with our school physician, that the district will not take any field trips through the end of April. At that time, we will determine whether to allow May/June trips.
 - ✦ Attendance at scheduled conferences and training sessions for staff will be at the discretion of the employee.

RECOVERY

In the event of school or office closures related to COVID-19, DTS will communicate when administration and Cumberland County Department of Health officials have conferred and determined that it is safe to return to school as well as what steps and precautions will need to be followed at that time.

All schools, offices, buses, and support vehicles will be cleaned and sterilized, as appropriate, prior to reopening of buildings. We will consult with our contracted transportation providers regarding company practices for cleaning and sterilization. As schools are reopened, a process for cleaning and disinfecting equipment (i.e. laptops, cell phones, etc.) and materials brought home during closure will also be implemented. Cleaning and sterilization practices will be guided by recommendations from the Cumberland County Department of Health.

Communications platforms that will be utilized to share information about the reopening of buildings and the reentry process will include but are not limited to the district website, emails, phone calls, text messages to staff and families, and postings to Class Dojo.

DTS will make every effort to return to “business as usual” following any necessary closures.

The district will also continue to partner with local health officials to monitor the illness on an ongoing basis and will continue to communicate with the community.

Debriefing among local health officials and school district staff will also occur after any closures to ensure that successes and challenges are identified to inform planning for any future pandemic events.