



January 30, 2020

Dear Georgia Educator and School Health Professional:

The purpose of this letter is to help inform school nurses, administrators, teachers and staff about current knowledge and guidance around the role of the school in responding to the novel (new) coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak, first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

In the United States, there are common coronaviruses that circulate every year, which usually cause upper respiratory tract illnesses much like the common cold. The overall risk of 2019-nCoV coronavirus to the general public and schools is low, and symptoms such as fever and cough resemble seasonal flu. The best way to prevent infection with any respiratory virus is to use the same preventive strategies used during a normal cold and flu season: get a flu shot every year, wash hands regularly with warm water and soap, cover coughs and sneezes, and stay home when experiencing symptoms of illness.

Novel coronavirus is spread similarly to other respiratory illnesses, like the flu and the common cold, through coughing or sneezing by those who already have symptoms. Based on current information, a person who is not showing any signs or symptoms of nCoV infection does not pose a risk to others and does not need to be excluded from school, work, or normal day to day activities. In addition, students, faculty or staff whose family members have traveled from China in the last 14 days also **do not need to be excluded from school**. We understand that school staff, parents and the community are concerned about the health and safety of our children, however, it is important to understand the risk of disease transmission and not impose unnecessary restrictions on persons who do not present an immediate health risk.

Students, faculty or staff who have traveled from China in the past 14 days and do have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing should seek medical care, and should contact their healthcare provider and inform them of their travel history before visiting the healthcare facility.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health authorities from around the globe are closely monitoring the 2019-nCoV outbreak and have implemented measures to prevent the spread of the virus. This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) can assist you in the protection of your students, faculty and administration, and will adapt our guidance as we learn more about this novel disease. If you have questions or concerns, please contact your local public health district or call 404-657-6588.

For current information about the disease, the countries affected by this outbreak, and contact information for local public health in GA, please visit the DPH website <https://dph.georgia.gov/>.

For more information about novel coronavirus visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathleen E. Toomey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner and State Health Officer