

# Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Accessible version: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

## Summary of Recent Changes

Revisions were made on 3/11/2020 to reflect the following:

- Clarification of appropriate mitigation strategies based on level of community transmission of COVID-19 and presence of COVID-19 cases within the school.
- Schools, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases and protecting vulnerable students and staff, to help ensure students have safe and healthy learning environments.
- Guidance for child care programs and schools is organized into three categories based on the level of community transmission: 1) when there is no community transmission (preparedness phase), 2) when there is minimal to moderate community transmission, and 3) when there is substantial community transmission.
- Guidance is also provided for when a confirmed case has entered a school, regardless of the level of community transmission.
- All decisions about implementing school-based strategies (e.g., dismissals, event cancellations, other social distancing measures) should be made locally, in collaboration with local health officials who can help determine the level of transmission in the community. Information about level of transmission is available in CDC's framework for mitigation.

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For more information: [www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

## This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Please check the following CDC website periodically for updated interim guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 into US communities. Schools play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, schools should take steps to disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. Schools should prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their students and staff should local health officials identify such a need.

Schools should continue to collaborate, share information, and review plans with local health officials to help protect the whole school community, including those with special health needs. School plans should be designed to complement other community mitigation strategies to protect high risk populations and the healthcare system, and minimize disruption to teaching and learning and protect students and staff from social stigma and discrimination. Plans should build on everyday practices (e.g., encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely) that include strategies for *before*, *during*, and *after* a possible outbreak.

## Who is this guidance for?

This interim guidance is intended for administrators of public and private child care programs and K-12 schools. Administrators are individuals who oversee the daily operations of child care programs and K-12 schools, and may include positions like child care program directors, school district superintendents, principals, and assistant principals.

This guidance is intended for administrators at both the school/facility and district level.

## Why is this guidance being issued?

This guidance will help child care programs, schools, and their partners understand how to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 within child care and school communities and facilities. It also aims to help child care programs, schools, and partners react quickly should a case be identified. The guidance includes considerations to help administrators plan for the continuity of teaching and learning if there is community spread of COVID-19.

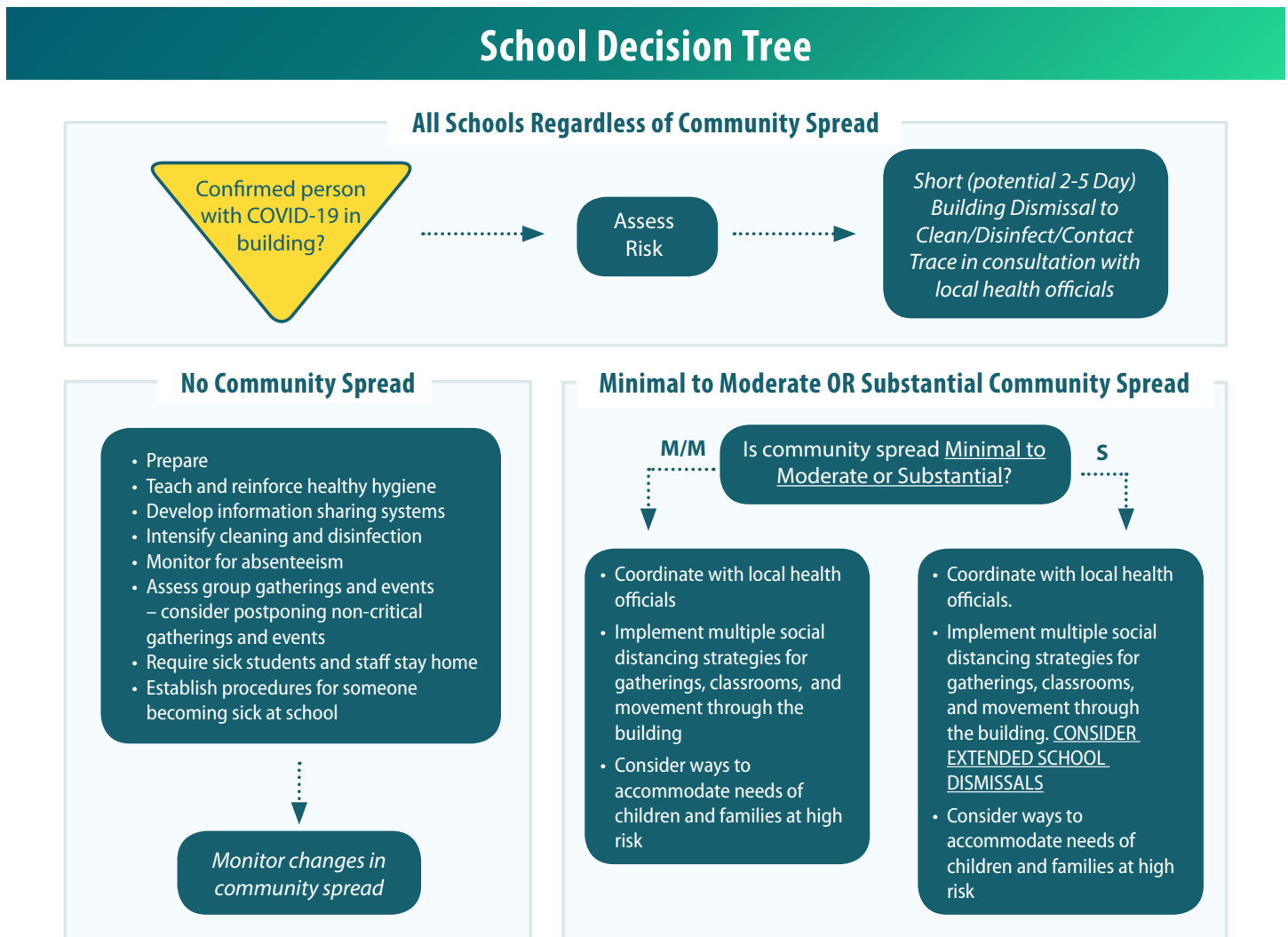
## What is the role of schools in responding to COVID-19?

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. Schools serve students, staff, and visitors from throughout the community. All of these people may have close contact in the school setting, often sharing spaces, equipment, and supplies.

Information about [COVID-19 in children](#) is somewhat limited, but the information that is available suggests that children with confirmed COVID-19 generally had mild symptoms. However, a small percentage of children have been reported to have more severe illness. People who have serious chronic medical conditions are believed to be at higher risk. Despite lower risk of serious illness among most children, children with COVID-19-like symptoms should avoid contact with others who might be at higher risk, such as [older adults and adults with serious chronic medical conditions](#).

## How should schools prepare for, and respond to, COVID-19?

Schools should be prepared for COVID-19 outbreaks in their local communities and for individual exposure events to occur in their facilities, regardless of the level of community transmission, for example a case associated with recent travel to an area with sustained COVID-19 transmission. The following decision tree can be used to help schools determine which set of mitigation strategies may be most appropriate for their current situation.



## When a confirmed case has entered a school, regardless of community transmission

Any school in any community might need to implement short-term closure procedures regardless of community spread if an infected person has been in a school building. If this happens, CDC recommends the following procedures regardless of the level of community spread:

- √ **Coordinate with local health officials.** Once learning of a COVID-19 case in someone who has been in the school, immediately notify local health officials. These officials will help administrators determine a course of action for their child care programs or schools.
- √ **Dismiss students and most staff for 2-5 days.** This initial short-term dismissal allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the school. This allows the local health officials to help the school determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended dismissal duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.
  - Local health officials' recommendations for the scope (e.g., a single school, multiple schools, the full district)

and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the community.

- During school dismissals, also cancel extracurricular group activities, school-based afterschool programs, and large events (e.g., assemblies, spirit nights, field trips, and sporting events).
- Discourage staff, students, and their families from gathering or socializing anywhere. This includes group child care arrangements, as well as gathering at places like a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or the local shopping mall.

√ **Communicate with staff, parents, and students.** Coordinate with local health officials to communicate dismissal decisions and the possible COVID-19 exposure.

- This communication to the school community should align with the communication plan in the school's emergency operations plan.
- Plan to include messages to counter potential [stigma](#) and discrimination.
- In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student or staff member as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.

√ **Clean and disinfect thoroughly.**

- Close off areas used by the individuals with COVID-19 and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
- Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
  - A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
  - Additionally, diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
    - 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or
    - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water
- Additional information on cleaning and disinfection of community facilities such as schools can be found on [CDC's website](#).

√ **Make decisions about extending the school dismissal.** Temporarily dismissing child care programs and K-12 schools is a strategy to stop or slow the further spread of COVID-19 in communities.

- During school dismissals (after cleaning and disinfection), child care programs and schools may stay open for staff members (unless ill) while students stay home. Keeping facilities open: a) allows teachers to develop and

deliver lessons and materials remotely, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning; and b) allows other staff members to continue to provide services and help with additional response efforts. Decisions on which, if any, staff should be allowed in the school should be made in collaboration with local health officials.

- Child care and school administrators should work in close collaboration and coordination with local health officials to make dismissal and large event cancellation decisions. Schools are not expected to make decisions about dismissal or canceling events on their own. School dismissals and event cancellations may be extended if advised by local health officials. The nature of these actions (e.g., geographic scope, duration) may change as the local outbreak situation evolves.
- Administrators should seek guidance from local health officials to determine when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community. In addition, students and staff who are well but are taking care of or share a home with someone with a case of COVID-19 should follow instructions from local health officials to determine when to return to school.

## √ **Implement strategies to continue education and related supports for students.**

### • **Ensure continuity of education**

- Review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching and learning. Implement e-learning plans, including digital and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate.
- Determine, in consultation with school district officials or other relevant state or local partners:
  - If a waiver is needed for state requirements of a minimum number of in-person instructional hours or school days (seat time) as a condition for funding;
  - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train teachers to do so;
  - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff;
  - How to encourage appropriate adult supervision while children are using distance learning approaches; and
  - How to deal with the potential lack of students' access to computers and the Internet at home.

### • **Ensure continuity of meal programs.**

- Consider ways to distribute food to students.
- If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bagged lunches or meal delivery.

### • **Consider alternatives for providing essential medical and social services for students.**

- Continue providing necessary services for children with special healthcare needs, or work with the state *Title V Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program*.

## **When there is no community transmission (preparedness phase)**

The most important thing to do now is **plan and prepare**. Administrators should reinforce healthy practices among their students and staff. As the global outbreak evolves, schools should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks. Schools need to **be ready** if COVID-19 does appear in their communities. Here are some strategies:

- √ **Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).** This should be done in collaboration

with [local health departments](#) and other relevant partners. 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). This includes strategies for social distancing and school dismissal that may be used to stop or slow the spread of infectious disease. The plan should also include strategies for continuing education, meal programs, and other related services in the event of school dismissal.
- Ensure the plan emphasizes everyday preventive actions for students 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.
  - CDC has workplace resources such as posters with messages for staff about [staying home when sick](#) and how to [avoid spreading germs at work](#).
  - Other health and education professional organizations may also have helpful resources your child care facility or school can use or share. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics provides information on [germ prevention strategies](#) and [reducing the spread of illness in child care settings](#).
- Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing the EOP:
  - Multiple federal agencies have developed resources on school planning principles and a 6-step process for creating plans to build and continually foster safe and healthy school communities *before, during, and after* possible emergencies. Key resources include [guidance on developing high-quality school emergency operations plans](#), and a [companion guide on the role of school districts in developing high-quality school emergency operations plans](#).
  - The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA to schools and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

#### √ **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.

#### √ **Teach and reinforce healthy hygiene practices.**

- Train staff on healthy hygiene practices so they can teach these to students.
- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](#), information on [proper handwashing technique](#), and [tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits](#).
- Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissue) to support healthy hygiene practices.

#### √ **Intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts.**

- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops). Clean with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on



the label. For disinfection most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#). Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

- Provide EPA-registered disposable wipes to teachers and staff so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down before use.
- Ensure adequate supplies to support cleaning and disinfection practices.

### √ **Monitor and plan for absenteeism.**

- Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your school among both students and staff.
- Alert local health officials about large increases in student and staff absenteeism, particularly if absences appear due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the “flu,” which have symptoms similar to COVID-19).
- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick, even without documentation from doctors. 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.

### √ **Assess group gatherings and events. Consider postponing non-critical gatherings and events.**

- Ensure you have a clear understanding of all upcoming gatherings and large events for your school community (e.g., assemblies, field days, spirit nights, athletic events). Give special consideration to events that might put students, staff, or their families in close proximity to others from communities that may have identified cases of COVID-19.
- Consider whether any of these events should be canceled. Speak with local health officials to help determine the best approach.

### √ **Require sick students and staff to stay home. Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school.**

- Establish procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible.
- Keep sick students and staff, particularly those with symptoms of respiratory illness, separate from well students and staff until they can leave. Plan to have areas where these individuals can be isolated from well students and staff until they can leave the school.
- Remember that [schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19](#). If a community (or more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.
- Share resources with the school community to help families understand when to keep children home. This guidance, not specific to COVID-19, from the American Academy of Pediatrics can be helpful for [families](#).

## √ **Create and test communications plans for use with the school community.**

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and their families.
- Include information about steps being taken by the school or child care facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.
- Test communication capacity, and reiterate steps staff, students, and families can take to stay healthy and guidance that they should stay home if sick.

## √ **Review CDC's guidance for businesses and employers.**

- Review this CDC [guidance](#) to identify any additional strategies the school can use, given its role as an employer.

Child care and K-12 administrators can support their school community by sharing resources with students (if resources are age-appropriate), their families, and staff. Coordinate with local health officials to determine what type of information might be best to share with the school community. Consider sharing the following fact sheets and information sources:

- Information about COVID-19 available through [state](#) and [local](#) health departments
- General CDC fact sheets to help staff and students' families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
  - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19](#)
- CDC Information on [COVID-19 and children](#)
- CDC information for staff, students, and their families who have recently traveled back to the United States from areas where CDC has identified community spread of coronavirus:
  - A list of countries where community spread of COVID-19 is occurring can be found on the CDC webpage: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#)

**For questions about students who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC's [FAQ for travelers](#). Schools can also consult with state and local health officials.**

Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials. COVID-19 information for travel is updated regularly on the [CDC website](#).

## When there is minimal to moderate community transmission

If local health officials report that there are multiple cases of COVID-19 in the community, schools may need to implement additional strategies in response to prevent spread in the school, but they should continue using the strategies they implemented when there was no community transmission. These additional strategies include:

- √ **Coordinate with local health officials.** This should be a first step in making decisions about responses to the presence of COVID-19 in the community. Health officials can help a school determine which set of strategies might be most appropriate for their specific community's situation.
- √ **Implement multiple social distancing strategies.** Select strategies based on feasibility given the unique space and needs of the school. Not all strategies will be feasible for all schools. For example, limiting hall movement



options can be particularly challenging in secondary schools. Many strategies that are feasible in primary or secondary schools may be less feasible in child care settings. Administrators are encouraged to think creatively about all opportunities to increase the physical space between students and limit interactions in large group settings. Schools may consider strategies such as:

- **Cancel field trips, assemblies, and other large gatherings.** Cancel activities and events such as field trips, student assemblies, athletic events or practices, special performances, school-wide parent meetings, or spirit nights.
  - **Cancel or modify classes where students are likely to be in very close contact.** For example, in physical education or choir classes, consider having teachers come to classrooms to prevent classes mixing with others in the gymnasium or music room).
  - **Increase the space between desks.** Rearrange student desks to maximize the space between students. Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) to reduce transmission caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing).
  - **Avoid mixing students in common areas.** For example, allow students to eat lunch and breakfast in their classrooms rather than mixing in the cafeteria. If it is not possible to suspend use of common areas, try to limit the extent to which students mix with each other, and particularly with students from other classes (e.g., stagger lunch by class, segregate lunch and recess area by class, send a few students into the library to pick out books rather than going as a class, suspend the use of lockers). Restrict hallway use through homeroom stays or staggered release of classes. Try to avoid taking multiple classes to bathrooms at once (e.g., avoid having all classes use the bathroom right after lunch or recess). In child care or elementary school settings, consider staggering playground use rather than allowing multiple classes to play together, and limit other activities where multiple classes interact.
  - **Stagger arrival and/or dismissal times.** These approaches can limit the amount of close contact between students in high-traffic situations and times.
  - **Reduce congestion in the health office.** For example, use the health office for children with flu-like symptoms and a satellite location for first aid or medication distribution.
  - **Limit nonessential visitors.** Limit the presence of volunteers for classroom activities, mystery readers, cafeteria support, and other activities.
  - **Limit cross-school transfer for special programs.** For example, if students are brought from multiple schools for special programs (e.g., music, robotics, academic clubs), consider using distance learning to deliver the instruction or temporarily offering duplicate programs in the participating schools.
  - **Teach staff, students, and their families to maintain distance from each other in the school.** Educate staff, students, and their families at the same time and explain why this is important.
- √ **Consider ways to accommodate the needs of children and families at [risk](#)** for serious illness from COVID-19. Consider if and how to honor requests of parents who may have concerns about their children attending school due to underlying medical conditions of their children or others in their home.

Additional information about social distancing, including information on its use for other viral illnesses, is available in this [CDC publication](#).

## When there is substantial community transmission

Additional strategies should be considered when there is substantial transmission in the local community in addition to those implemented when there is no, minimal, or moderate transmission. These strategies include:

- √ **Continue to coordinate with local health officials.** If local health officials have determined there is substantial

transmission of COVID-19 within the community, they will provide guidance to administrators on the best course of action for child care programs or schools. These strategies are expected to extend across multiple programs, schools, or school districts within the community, as they are not necessarily tied to cases within schools or child care facilities.

√ **Consider extended school dismissals.** In collaboration with local health officials, implement extended school dismissals (e.g., dismissals for longer than two weeks). This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, dismissal strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community. During extended school dismissals, also cancel extracurricular group activities, school-based afterschool programs, and large events (e.g., assemblies, spirit nights, field trips, and sporting events). Remember to implement strategies to ensure the continuity of education (e.g., distance learning) as well as meal programs and other essential services for students.