

Infectious Diseases

The *Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center* provides guidance for the courses of action needed to address infectious diseases in schools **before**, **during**, and **after** an outbreak. The term outbreak could be replaced with epidemic or pandemic if it was officially determined that a particular infectious disease had reached the levels prescribed for those labels.

This section is intended to:

- Consider multiple diseases
- Decrease exposure to the disease
- Limit the disruption of day-to-day learning activities
- Adapt to evolving knowledge and guidance
- Support individuals with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs
- Include a continuum of response measures to address a variety of scenarios such as a single case, an outbreak, an epidemic, or a pandemic, and varying levels of severity of symptoms

Before Phase

Important procedures that should be implemented and enforced before an infectious disease outbreak occurs include:

- Enforce hand-washing policies and procedures
 - Ensure hand-washing policies and procedures are in place
 - Ensure hand-washing supplies are readily available
 - Teach students and staff how to wash hands properly
 - Routinely communicate information and launch awareness campaigns
- Provide education regarding cough and sneeze etiquette
 - Teach students and staff how to cough/sneeze into their elbow or to use a tissue
 - Teach students and staff how to properly dispose of tissues
 - Routinely communicate information and launch awareness campaign
- Review and update routine cleaning and sanitation policies
 - Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and commonly shared resources (e.g., toys, musical instruments)
 - Ensure appropriate practices and use of products and provide training to ensure staff and teachers follow safe chemical management policies
- Review policies and practices related to handling animals in school or on field trips
 - Some animals carry bacteria, such as salmonella. Students and staff should always wash hands after handling animals.

- Ensure students are appropriately vaccinated
 - Develop immunization policies and practices
 - Continually assess student vaccination records
 - Provide school-located vaccination clinics
 - Routinely communicate information and launch awareness campaign/provide education

During Phase

Response measures that should be implemented during an outbreak include the following:

- Promote early treatment for those who may be at higher risk
- Advise the sick to stay home from school and school events
- Conduct active screening for illness at school
- Separate sick students and staff at school
- Increase social distances within the school environment
- Adapt attendance policies
- Consider school dismissals
- Work with public health officials to monitor the situation
- Determine the source of outbreak, scale, and case definition to figure out the response required and level of infectiousness
- Provide information/education about characteristics of disease, methods of detecting or preventing disease or positive aspects of the situation
- Consider removing furniture, rugs, toys, & other items that cannot be easily cleaned each day
- Limit sharing of electronic devices, toys, books, games, learning aids, etc. and clean and disinfect between users
- Assess group gatherings and events, and consider postponing non-critical gatherings and events
- Enforce district policies, such as those relating to exclusion guidelines and school dismissals
- Refer to district procedures regarding return to school protocols pertaining to specific illness

Possible Response Actions

There are several factors to consider when deciding whether or not to close the school. There are three types of dismissals in these circumstances. When considering these options, it is important to review legal authorities for school closures during declared emergencies and non-emergencies.

Depending on the severity and transmissibility of the illness, and the number of affected students or staff, schools may decide to close to mitigate disease transmission or until enough students or staff are healthy enough to return to school. Types of school dismissals include:

- Selective dismissals prevent the spread of disease to vulnerable communities
- Reactive dismissals occur when schools are not able to maintain normal functioning
- Preemptive dismissals are proactive strategies to decrease the spread of disease

After Phase

It's important to work with health officials to determine appropriate protocols for identifying and separating students and staff. This includes:

- Actively screening for illness before and during the school day
- Increasing social distances within the school environment
- Students and staff who develop symptoms of infection at school will need care and attention

Possible Response Actions

Sick persons should be kept separated from others until they can go home or be transferred to an alternative setting for care or treatment.

After an outbreak occurs, schools and districts should focus on these two things:

- Determine if a school facility needs remediation before it can reopen
- Determine a process for reopening schools or reconvening students
- Inform students, staff, and families of the outcome of the emergency, as well as practices that will be implemented to prevent such an outbreak in the future