

Back to School: Communicable Disease Awareness for District Leadership

Communicable disease outbreaks are disruptive to the learning environment. Continued attention and awareness are essential as outbreaks are occurring regularly across the country and locally.

What you can do:

Prevention

- Check with your facilities manager about indoor air quality and safe and effective cleaning procedures.
- Encourage handwashing and respiratory hygiene.
- Ensure your school is collecting immunization records for all students in compliance with RCW 28A.210.060-170.

Preparedness

- Check in with your school nurse about readiness to create school susceptible lists of all individuals who do not have immunity to specific conditions such as measles and pertussis. Provide support as needed to ensure readiness.
- Communicate with staff about the importance of ready access to documentation of immunity for vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles or pertussis through blood tests (titers) or immunization records. *Note:* there is no requirement in the law for school staff to be vaccinated; however, in the event of a communicable disease outbreak, school personnel may be unable to work if not able to prove immunity.
- Develop or update multilingual communication templates for families before they are needed, including notifications about exposures, exclusion requirements, return-to-school criteria, and available community resources.
- Coordinate with school nurses and communications staff to identify how health information will be shared quickly and consistently while protecting student privacy.
- Include communicable disease information in back-to-school packets or orientation materials.
- Provide annual reminders about attendance and exclusion policies for illness.
- Identify community partners (local healthcare providers, pharmacies, public health agencies) that families can access for vaccinations or health information.
- Have your support resources readily available:
 - o Your [Local Health Jurisdiction](#) — make sure you have contact information and they have yours.



- o Department of Health (DOH) [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff](#)
 - o Center for Disease Control (CDC) Toolkit [Preventing Spread of Infections in K-12 Schools | CDC](#)
 - o Washington Department of Health (WADOH) [Measles Preparedness for Schools](#)
 - o [Safe Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Schools](#)
 - o [WADOH and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\) K-12 Health & Safety Guide \(2024\)](#)
 - o [Planning for Outbreaks, Epidemics, and Pandemics | CDC](#)
- Review your Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) in case of school closures. Determine how you will provide educational services to students who are unable to attend school or if a school has to close. Consider how medically fragile students and families with limited access to healthcare or transportation may need additional support during an outbreak.
- Identify appropriate school staff who will be involved in response and establish communication channels.

Family Engagement and Awareness

- Communicate with families before communicable disease season begins. Share information about common illnesses, prevention strategies, immunization requirements, and when students should stay home due to illness.
- Encourage families to review each child's immunization records and work with their healthcare provider to ensure vaccinations are up to date or that exemption documentation is current, as required by state law.
- Remind families to keep emergency contact information current so schools can quickly communicate important health information or arrange for student pickup if necessary.
- Share information in multiple languages and through multiple communication channels to help ensure all families receive timely, accessible information.
- Encourage families to establish a plan for childcare and learning in the event a student must remain home due to illness, quarantine, or exclusion during an outbreak.
- Reinforce that families play an important role by monitoring students for symptoms each day and keeping sick children home to help reduce the spread of illness within schools. Use the [“When is Your Child Too sick for School?”](#) Flyers: [Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Ukrainian](#) | [Vietnamese](#)

Response

- Coordinate with and respond under the direction of the Local Health Jurisdiction.
- Be prepared to provide requested information promptly, such as susceptible lists for rapid identification of at-risk students and staff.

- Communicate with families in collaboration with your Local Health Jurisdiction, providing timely, accurate, and consistent information about exposures, recommended actions, exclusion requirements, and return-to-school guidance. Be prepared to answer frequently asked questions and direct families to trusted public health resources.

This overview highlights practical steps school districts can take to prepare for communicable disease outbreaks. Effective preparedness relies on strong partnerships among schools, families, healthcare providers, and public health agencies, supported by clear, consistent communication before and during an outbreak. By planning ahead and using the resources provided, districts can protect the health of their school communities, minimize disruptions to learning, and maintain operations should an outbreak occur.