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COVID-19: A Guide for New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education March 11, 2020

As New Jersey continues to monitor the evolving outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its impact on communities, guidance will continue to be published and updated on the New Jersey Department of Health's webpage: [NJDOH's COVID-19 Information for Schools and Businesses](https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schoolbusiness.shtml) available at https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schoolbusiness.shtml. This supplementary guidance provided by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) is to help institutions plan and prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks and the potential for a confirmed on-campus case.

- **Immediate action steps.**

- Institutions should convene their emergency management team immediately, if they have not already done so, and on an ongoing regular basis.
- This team should be reviewing, updating, and implementing the institutions' Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). As part of this process, institutions should:
 - Assess whether their EOP is sufficient to address the COVID-19 situation as it evolves.
 - As a reminder, N.J.S.A. 18A:3B-69(a)(1) specifically requires that EOPs address pandemics;
 - Consider the feasibility of distance learning, including how to make accommodations for those who may lack access to technology/broadband internet needed to participate in online instruction;
 - Update plans to include considerations for students who may be food or housing insecure;
 - Consider prior to making a decision to move classes online or to close campus:
 - Enacting plans to account for food – and housing-insecure individuals;
 - Establishing means of providing alternative accommodations and meals for such students; and
 - Review and update continuity of business plans.

- **Updating EOPs.**

- N.J.S.A. 18A:3B-69 requires institutions to update EOPs every five years or immediately when an emergency incident occurs at an institution.
- The most recently updated EOP is to be provided to OSHE for review by March 15, 2020.
- OSHE will review in consultation with the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, the State Office of Emergency Management, and the Department of Health.
- Updated plans should be sent to OSHE via email at OSHE@oshe.nj.gov.

- **Recommended Best Practices.**

- Institutions should connect with their local health agencies and share their emergency operations plans for handling pandemics. Institutions can visit the [DOH's interactive local health directory map](https://www.nj.gov/health/lh/community/index.shtml) to determine the local health authority within your jurisdiction. It is available at <https://www.nj.gov/health/lh/community/index.shtml>.
- Institutional leaders should monitor daily the [New Jersey Department of Health](https://www.nj.gov/health/), [Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov/), U.S. Department of Education (<https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>), and [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/) websites to ensure they are kept abreast of most up-to-date information on this rapidly evolving situation.
- Institutions should consider postponing or cancelling study abroad programs.
- Institutions should be flexible in making accommodations for students and employees who may be subject to quarantine.
- Institutions should commit to raising awareness of the facts surrounding COVID-19 and prevent stigmas related to COVID-19 in their communities. The CDC maintains a helpful webpage specifically dedicated to the stigmas surrounding coronavirus, which can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>.
- To help inform stakeholders, institutions should include a 'Coronavirus Update' section on their websites to help ensure stakeholders are focusing on facts and institutions are being transparent in the actions taken. Regular updates for the campus community should be provided on a regular basis, including regarding when regular operations are likely to resume. Communication is a key component of an EOP. General information that can be used for the Coronavirus Update can be found on NJDOH's webpage, found here: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_community.shtml

OSHE will continue to share updated guidance and information as it becomes available. Institutions should continue to coordinate with state and local officials as they develop COVID-19 preparations and plans. For additional clarification on questions related to New Jersey's COVID-19 outbreak, please see below.

How should institutions of higher education prepare for the coronavirus?

Institutions should have their emergency management teams meeting regularly to discuss, implement and update their EOPs. These plans should include identification of essential functions, programs, and personnel; procedures to implement the plan; delegation of authority; crisis communications protocols and identification of alternative facilities and related infrastructure. The emergency management team should also "stress-test" their EOPs with scenario training exercises and assess whether their EOP is sufficient to address the COVID-19 situation as it evolves.

How should institutions address material hardships students might face as a result of institutions closing?

OSHE recommends that institutions discuss alternative plans and appropriate accommodations for students that use the institution's campus as their primary residence or for students who cannot easily return home in the event of a campus shutdown. It is important that institutions plan and prepare which includes considering options for making the campus accessible to students who may not have another residence. An institution should also consider preparing campus food pantries or working with local community food pantries to help students locate food sources, if needed.

I heard that the Governor has declared a State of Emergency. What does that mean?

On March 9, 2020, Governor Phil Murphy declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency to contain the spread of COVID-19. Executive Order No. 103 declares a state of emergency and public health emergency across all of New Jersey, and allows state agencies and departments to utilize state resources to assist affected communities responding to and recovering from COVID-19 cases. The declaration tasks the State Director of Emergency Management and Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, in conjunction

with New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner to oversee the implementation of the State's EOP and generally direct the State's emergency response.

Additionally, the declaration triggers other executive powers and safeguards, such as prohibiting excessive price increases pursuant to New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act and the ability to relax certain State procurement procedures to expedite the delivery of goods and services necessary for coronavirus preparedness and response efforts.

Governor Murphy's emergency declaration also empowers all State agencies, specifically the Departments of Banking and Insurance, Health, Human Services, and the Civil Service Commission to take all appropriate steps to address the public health hazard of COVID-19.

The full text of Executive Order No. 103 can be found at <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-103.pdf>.

The Governor released travel directives restricting state travel. Does this extend to employees at public institutions of higher education?

The travel directives, which restrict international and domestic travel, apply only to executive branch agencies. Public institutions of higher education should continue to monitor the guidance provided by the DOH, CDC and WHO in formulating travel guidelines.

OSHE recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to level 3 destinations (currently identified as China, Iran, Italy and South Korea). It is recommended that older adults or those with chronic medical conditions consider postponing travel, if possible, especially to Japan or Hong Kong.

Any person or group planning a trip abroad should consult the CDC's travel website for current advisories regarding any travel restrictions. The situation is evolving so travelers should stay up to date with CDC's travel health notices related to this outbreak at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>. These notices will be updated as more information becomes available

In regards to travel, what should we be doing for our study abroad programs?

Institutions should consider postponing or canceling study abroad programs that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19 and assist students in their return home. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials as referenced below under "If a student or staff member recently returned from a level 3 country in the past 14 days?" COVID-19 information for travel is updated regularly on the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

What should we do about students traveling for spring break?

Prior to traveling, individuals should consider the potential risks that may be involved in visiting their destination, including risk of transmission as well as the risk of quarantine upon returning. Destinations experiencing sustained community transmission should be avoided. Any person or group planning a trip outside of the United States should consult the CDC website for current travel advisories regarding any restrictions on travel. The situation is evolving. Stay up to date with CDC's travel health notices related to this outbreak at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

If a student or staff member recently returned from a level 3 country in the past 14 days, should they be excluded from work or school?

There are now several countries identified by the CDC as level 3 (those with ongoing, sustained community transmission). Currently, those countries are China, Iran, Italy and South Korea and that list is expected to increase. The CDC has issued travel advisories for level 3 countries <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019->

[ncov/travelers/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html). Students and staff returning from countries with widespread sustained transmission (level 3 countries) should follow recommendations provided by CDC at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>. This may include self-quarantine with health monitoring for 14 days from the time of departure from an area with widespread, ongoing spread of COVID-19.

What should an institution do if a student or staff member presents with symptoms of COVID-19?

Please encourage students or employees who exhibit signs of illness to stay home. DOH does not recommend that students be required to obtain a doctor's note in order to be excused from class as this may dissuade those who are ill from staying out of class and crowd doctors' offices with patients who do not need to be seen.

Institutions should provide flexibility to ensure that employees and students can fully comply with isolation or quarantine orders.

If my institution must utilize online programs or distance education to maintain continuity of instruction, will additional approval from OSHE or the Presidents' Council be required? Would additional approval from accrediting bodies be required?

Institutions do not need to obtain any additional approvals from OSHE or the Presidents' Council to offer currently approved academic programs in an online or distance education format. In regard to accreditation requirements, the U.S. Department of Education is permitting accreditors to waive their distance education review requirements for institutions working to accommodate students whose enrollment is otherwise interrupted as a result of COVID-19. See this announcement for more information:

<https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>.

However, your institution should consult with the applicable accreditors in regard to institutional and programmatic requirements for the use of distance education.

In addition, OSHE strongly recommends that your institution join NC-SARA if your institution is not currently a member of NC-SARA and there is a possibility that your institution may be offering distance education programs to students while they are located outside of New Jersey. NC-SARA membership will allow your institution to seamlessly offer distance education to students in every state except for California, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Please contact Eric Taylor at eric.taylor@oshe.nj.gov for more information.

Should the institution cancel all of our events on campus?

Per recommendations by the CDC, decisions about school dismissal or cancellation of school events should be made in coordination with local health officials. Colleges and universities are not expected to make decisions about dismissal and event cancellation in isolation. If COVID-19 is occurring in your community, public health considerations may warrant modifying, postponing, or cancelling mass gatherings. Dismissal and event cancellation decisions should be considered on a case-by-case basis using information from health officials about the local conditions.

In addition, students should be reminded that part of good hygiene practice is staying home from events when they are ill.

If a student's primary residence is campus housing and they are under quarantine (self-quarantine or quarantine order), what facilities should be provided?

If the student is quarantined in a residence with their own room and have access to their own bathroom, the student may be able to quarantine in place. The CDC has approved the use of hotels/motels for quarantine. Your local health department is available to advise on potential options for quarantine locations.

Does the requirement for my institution to report incidents per the Clery Act continue to apply when students are temporarily residing off-campus in facilities provided by my institution, such as a hotel, and if so, when does that reporting requirement begin to apply?

Yes, institutions of higher education that are subject to the Clery Act’s reporting requirements must continue to disclose campus security information even while students are temporarily residing off-campus in facilities provided by the institution. The reporting requirement begins to apply immediately for any such period of temporary residence by a student. For more detailed information, see The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting (2016 Edition) <https://clerycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/handbook-2.pdf>.

What should an institution do if a student disobeys a quarantine order?

Please contact your local health department if you believe a quarantine order is needed, or if someone has violated a quarantine order already in place.

What are the cleaning protocols for COVID-19 for which our institution should be aware?

Special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building, are not necessary or recommended by NJ Department of Health (DOH) to slow the spread of respiratory illness. Schools should follow standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an EPA-registered product. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.

DOH also recommends that employers increase education on respiratory hygiene. DOH recommends preventing transmission of respiratory infections by taking the following steps:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Washing hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Staying home from work if you are sick.
- Avoiding people who are sick.
- Getting a flu shot – it is not too late to be protected.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects.

How can institutions reduce fear and anxiety during this public health emergency?

In recognition that public health emergencies can cause panic, it is important that institutions focus on sharing only established facts with their community members. Raising awareness about the issue should be done quickly, accurately, and transparently. Institutions should abide by rules of privacy and confidentiality in dealing with any individuals on their campus who may be a patient. Institutions should continue to direct their stakeholders to mental health resources available within the community. Institutions should commit to reducing stigmatization of groups or individuals related to COVID-19. Additional guidance regarding stigma and resilience is available on the CDC website here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>.

How can I help share facts and resources with higher education stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students?

Institutions should consider including a direct link to COVID-19 resources on their institutional homepage, so that it is readily available for stakeholders. The CDC has provided several resources (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>) that can be printed and shared in public areas, shared on social media or distributed via email. These resources currently include posters detailing: facts about COVID-19, what to do if you are sick, how to stop the spread of germs, and how to properly wash your hands. There are also videos and a public health image library available. In addition, the

NJDOH and OSHE will continue to post updates on their social media pages, which can be shared with stakeholders. CDC resources are available here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>.

What if I still have questions?

OSHE will continue to share updated guidance and information as it becomes available from DOH, CDC and WHO. For health-related COVID-19 questions, please call the hotline run by the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) at 1-800-222-1222. If you are using an out-of-state phone line, please call 1-800-962-1253. You can also email DOH subject matter experts at ncov@doh.nj.gov with questions. Institutions can also continue to reach out to OSHE at O.OSHE@oshe.nj.gov.

Please follow OSHE on Twitter at [@NJHigherEd](https://twitter.com/NJHigherEd) and DOH on [Twitter @njdeptofhealth](https://twitter.com/njdeptofhealth), [Facebook /njdeptofhealth](https://facebook.com/njdeptofhealth), [Instagram @njdeptofhealth](https://instagram.com/njdeptofhealth) and [Snapchat @njdoh](https://snapchat.com/add/njdoh) for updates. OSHE has also added a direct link to our website for COVID-19 updates:

<https://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/>.