

February 6, 2020

Novel Coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV) Information for Schools and Universities

Many school and university students, faculty and staff within Georgia are concerned about how the current outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in China will impact their communities and wish to take appropriate steps to mitigate any risks. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working hard to learn as much as possible about this new virus so that they can better understand how it spreads and its associated illness. The Georgia Department of Health (DPH) is also working hard to develop guidance and educational materials should this new virus impact our residents. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020. However, the immediate health risk to the U.S. public is considered low at this time. If you have questions or concerns, please contact your local public health district or call 1-866-PUB-HLTH (782-4584) or 404-657-2588.

As this is an evolving situation, the most up-to-date information from the CDC can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> and from DPH at <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>.

What is the difference between seasonal flu and novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses and there are different types of coronaviruses within that family, much like there are different types of influenza viruses. In the United States, there are common coronaviruses that circulate every year, which usually cause upper respiratory tract illnesses much like the common cold. Coronaviruses tend to circulate in the fall and winter months, like influenza. Most people get infected with these viruses at some point in their lives.

The coronavirus that has recently emerged in Wuhan, China is a new type of coronavirus. 2019-nCoV and is infecting people for the first time, which means that people do not have immunity to it.

What are common symptoms of 2019-nCoV?

Symptoms of nCoV infection include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Some infected individuals go on to develop pneumonia requiring hospitalization. Severity of symptoms can span from asymptomatic or mild illness to severe or fatal illness.

How is 2019-nCoV spread?

Novel coronavirus is spread like other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu and the common cold, through coughing or sneezing by those who already have symptoms. There have also been reports of rare spread from an infected patient with no symptoms to a close contact.

What should students or faculty who have recently traveled to China do?

Because of the ever-expanding global outbreak, the federal government recently announced that all individuals (which may include students, faculty, or staff) who have traveled to China in the past 14 days and returned on or after February 3, 2020, will be requested to remain at home and be monitored for 2019-nCoV symptoms by the Georgia Department of Public Health.

School and university students, faculty or staff whose family members have traveled from China in the last 14 days (and are being monitored for symptoms) **do not need to be excluded from school.**

How is 2019-nCoV treated?

Currently, there is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for the new coronavirus. There is no vaccine to prevent this virus, and the CDC advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to it.

What preventive measures should schools and universities take to help reduce the spread of respiratory illness?

The Georgia Department of Public Health recommends that schools and universities increase education about respiratory hygiene. Students, faculty, and staff should follow these steps that prevent the transmission of respiratory infections:

- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home if you're sick, especially with a fever.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

Additional preventive measures include:

- If you had a fever, do not go to work or attend class until you are fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy and the provision of supplies.
- Get a flu shot – it's not too late to be protected!

For university students who present to Health Services:

- Students who visit health services should be instructed to wear a mask when they present with respiratory symptoms.
- Health personnel should inquire about travel history.
- Clinicians should wear person protective equipment to guard against potential exposure. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hcp-personnel-checklist.html>
- Continue to monitor up-to-date information from health officials.
- Always promote daily practice of everyday preventive actions.

- Have supplies on hand for staff and students (masks, soap, tissues, hand sanitizers, trash baskets).
- If you identify a patient suspected of having nCoV infection, immediately isolate them.

More Information

Outbreaks involving novel coronaviruses evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change frequently as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> Georgia Department of Public Health website: <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>

*Adapted from NJDOH Communicable Disease Service

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The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration ended at midnight on May 11, 2023.
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