**Boston Public Schools | COVID-19 (Coronavirus) FAQs**

**What You Need to Know About the Coronavirus (also called COVID-19)**

1. **How high is the risk of coronavirus in Boston?**

Currently, the risk in Boston remains low. Continually updated information about the risk level can be found on the Boston Public Health Commission’s (BPHC) website at [BPHC.org](https://www.bphc.org/).

1. **How is the coronavirus spread?**

The coronavirus can spread when: (1) an infected person coughs or sneezes on another, and (2) that other person then touches their own mouth, nose, or eyes and becomes contaminated with the virus. Coronavirus may be spread through close contact with someone who is infected (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more).

1. **What are the common symptoms of the coronavirus?**

Most people infected with the virus have relatively mild symptoms similar to the flu including fever, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Much rarer and generally only for people with compromised immune systems, experience a severe case of infection which can cause bronchitis, pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

1. **Is there a vaccine to prevent the coronavirus?**

There is no vaccine at this time.

1. **Where can I find more information about the virus?**

More information is available at BPHC’s website [bphc.org](https://www.bphc.org/) or the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) website [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/).

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| **CDC What You Need**  **to Know:**  [English](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf)  [Chinese](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet-chinese.pdf)  [Spanish](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet-sp.pdf) | **CDC What To Do if**  **You're Sick:**  [English](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf)  [Chinese](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet-chinese.pdf)  [Spanish](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet-chinese.pdf) | **Boston Public Health Commission Fact Sheet:**  [English](https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/infectious-diseases/Infectious-Diseases-A-to-Z/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20Languages/2019%20novel%20coronavirus/English.pdf)  [Chinese](https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/infectious-diseases/Infectious-Diseases-A-to-Z/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20Languages/2019%20novel%20coronavirus/Chinese.pdf)  [Haitian Creole](https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/infectious-diseases/Infectious-Diseases-A-to-Z/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20Languages/2019%20novel%20coronavirus/Haitian%20Creole.pdf)  [Portuguese](https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/infectious-diseases/Infectious-Diseases-A-to-Z/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20Languages/2019%20novel%20coronavirus/Portuguese.pdf)  [Spanish](https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/infectious-diseases/Infectious-Diseases-A-to-Z/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20Languages/2019%20novel%20coronavirus/Spanish.pdf)  [Vietnamese](https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/infectious-diseases/Infectious-Diseases-A-to-Z/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20Languages/2019%20novel%20coronavirus/Vietnamese.pdf) |

If you have specific questions, you can call Mayor Walsh’s HealthLine at **617-534-5050**

during the week or dial **311** after business hours and on weekends.

**How to Protect Yourself, Your Family and Others**

1. **What is the most effective way to reduce the risk of contracting the virus?**

Have your family members practice the following precautions proven to reduce the risk of spreading respiratory viruses:

● Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds – which is

approximately the length of time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice

● If you do not have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand

sanitizer

● Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands

● Avoid close contact with people who are sick

1. **How can I best protect others?**

If you or a family member have cold-like symptoms, you can help protect others

by having that family member or yourself:

● Stay away from school while sick

● Avoid close contact with others

● Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue (or arm) when coughing or sneezing,

then throw the tissue in the trash and wash hands

● Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces touched by the person with symptoms

1. **Should I report that my child is sick?**

Please report your child’s absence to their school so we can better track the virus

and provide supports where they are needed. Follow standard practice by

describing any relevant symptoms so BPS can accurately monitor the health of

the BPS community. If your child is not experiencing any symptoms as identified

in a doctor’s note and has not traveled to infected areas or been in close contact

with others who have, absences will be processed in accordance with standard BPS policies.

1. **How will my student be treated when they return from an absence?**

Every member of the BPS community deserves to be treated with respect and

kindness when they return to school after an illness. Keep in mind that family vacations, routine medical appointments, and typical childhood illnesses will

continue; they are most likely the reason for any specific student missing school.

**Things Not to Do**

1. **Should travel be avoided?**

Currently, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends no travel to

China, Japan, South Korea, Iran and Italy. For an up-to-date list of areas to

which travel should be avoided, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/)

1. **Should I keep my student home if they have traveled internationally?**

Yes. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) have issued direction on this question. People who have traveled to China, Iran, Italy, Japan, or South Korea should stay at home for 14 days upon return to the United States to monitor their health and should not to go to school or work. This applies to travel that has occured in the last two weeks and going forward. It also applies whether or not your child has already returned to school since your return.

1. **Should I keep my student home if they have not traveled internationally**

**and have no symptoms or any documented exposure to the virus?**

Because the risk of infection remains low in our community, our local health

officials advise that there is no need for students to lose important learning time

or other educational opportunities through self-quarantine measures unless they

have traveled to infected areas or are experiencing symptoms. Public health officials are monitoring all returnees for any evidence of infection to prevent exposure of others. If you choose to keep your student out of school absent the presence of any symptoms of infection, the BPS absentee policy should be followed.

1. **Should I send my student to school with a facemask?**

Please do not use facemasks unless previously directed to by your physician for other medical conditions. The CDC does not recommend the use of facemasks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wearing a mask creates an illusion of safety, which puts students at greater risk and often results in reduced participation in the recommended safety precautions such as frequent hand washing and sanitation.

**What BPS is Doing to Prepare**

1. **Will schools be closing?**

Currently, the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus remains low in Boston. BPS will follow the direction of local health officials on school closures if Boston experiences a significant change. BPS will make these decisions in partnership with the City, the BPHC and other community agencies and organizations.

If the decision is made to close schools, BPS will promptly notify the school community through automated calls, email, text message and news outlets.

1. **Are BPS-sponsored international trips cancelled?**

BPS has already directed schools to cancel school-sponsored trips to China until further notice. BPS later directed schools to cancel all school-sponsored trips to Europe until further notice. For a list of countries that have reported the presence of the virus, click here [cdc.gov].

On March 6th, under the directive from the Governor, BPS directed schools to cancel all international school-sponsored trips through the remainder of the year. *\*this does not include Puerto Rico*

1. **Are school-based events being cancelled?**

Events scheduled at BPS schools will not be cancelled unless and until the risk of infection or exposure increases to a level that requires such action to protect the safety of the community. BPS will make these decisions in partnership with the City, the BPHC and other community agencies and organizations, and will promptly notify the school community through automated calls, email, and text message. This information will also be available on [www.bostonpublicschools.org](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org), the BPS Twitter page, the BPS Facebook page, and local media.

1. **BPS is taking extra care in ensuring our schools are clean and healthy.**

BPS custodians in all schools are working to keep our schools safe and clean. Custodians are working to deep clean each schools and are ensuring that all cleaning supplies being used are in compliance with CDC guidelines. Schools have sufficient supplies of soap on-hand and are ensuring that soap dispensers are constantly stocked and refilled throughout the day.

The BPS Transportation team is working with the MBTA to ensure that both yellow buses and MBTA busses and trains are cleaned frequently.

1. **How is BPS monitoring the changing situation?**

Superintendent Cassellius and Central Office staff are in daily contact with Mayor Walsh, the City’s leadership teams, the BPHC and (through the BPHC) the CDC, as well as with school districts throughout the state and the nation. BPS has provided guidance to our school nurses, school leaders, educators and school staff on how best to handle this evolving situation.

1. **How will BPS share updated information?**

Until further notice, BPS will update the bostonpublicschools.org/coronavirus website every Friday by noon, even if only to inform the community that nothing has changed. As necessary, BPS will also communicate with families through printed communications and emails/calls.

If you have questions that are not answered here, please contact coronavirus@bostonpublicschools.org. You will receive a response within 48 hours.

**What Educators Can Do to Prepare**

1. **As an educator, what should I be doing to help my students get through this?**

Continue to provide your students with the quality education and supports that they deserve and expect from their BPS community. In addition, reinforce the importance of hand hygiene and cough etiquette, lifelong skills that will benefit all members of the BPS community.

1. **What should I do to protect myself?**

Take care of yourself. If you have cold-like symptoms:

● Stay home from work and take sick leave consistent with procedures established by district policy or your union's collective bargaining agreement.

● Avoid close contact with others

● Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (or arm) when coughing or sneezing, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands

● Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces you touch to avoid infection.

1. **What do I do if my students tell me they feel sick?**

Follow the standard of care by sending to the office those students who do not feel well. The student’s parent or guardian will be notified. Students will be isolated and monitored until they are picked up.

1. **How can I support the other educators and school leaders in my building?**

Using provided cleaning supplies, engage your students as appropriate to sanitize frequently touched surfaces (doorknobs, desks, etc.) In addition, report to your school leader and custodian any lack of soap, sanitizer or other necessary cleaning products so those materials can be restocked immediately.

**24. What should I do if I have questions regarding absences related to this situation?**

Please reach out to the Office of Human Capital Leave of Absence Team (ohcleaves@bostonpublicschools.org) for support with managing the absences and to ensure a safe reentry into the school community.