Resources for Discussing COVID-19

1. How should I talk with students about COVID-19 in a way that won’t create more anxiety?

   In addition to talking with children about the importance of washing hands, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when they are sick, there are a number of resources to support families and staff in talking with children about COVID-19. Consider sharing resources with families and staff to support healthy discussion at home and in the classroom, this may include sharing information through your newsletter or posting resources on your school’s website.

   https://www.fcps.edu/blog/talking-children-about-coronavirus


   https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/coronavirus-resources

   School nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers can support these discussions and follow up with students who may need additional support.

2. I am seeing an uptick of discrimination in my school community, especially towards my Asian students and families. What are some things I can do to address it?

   Principals and staff members can help fight sigma and support others by sharing accurate information and staying informed through reputable, trusted resources. Principals can use the following language or similar age-appropriate language when communicating with students, families, and staff about COVID-19:

   *FCPS reminds our community that coronavirus doesn’t recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity. Having Asian ancestry – or any other ancestry – does not make a person more vulnerable to this illness. FCPS urges individuals to avoid spreading misinformation and to stay up-to-date with accurate information through reputable sources. Help stop fear by letting people know that being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19.*
This message should be reinforced frequently.

As a reminder, FCPS does not tolerate racism or discrimination in any way as defined in our Students Rights and Responsibilities. Principals should follow existing FCPS protocols for documenting and responding to incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Schools may also contact their region equity specialist to consult on school specific situations.

- Region 1, Alicia Hunter, ashunter@fcps.edu
- Region 2, Kim Amenabar, KBAmenabar@fcps.edu
- Region 3, Shannon Merriweather, semerriweather@fcps.edu
- Region 4, Tia Lott, Lott, tjlott@fcps.edu
- Region 5, Darnessia Harvey, DYHarvey@fcps.edu

Finally, this resource from Teaching Tolerance, may also be helpful in planning and responding to situations: https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/speaking-up-against-racism-around-the-new-coronavirus

3. **Should I send out my own messages to my staff or community about COVID-19? If so, what should I include?**

   Schools have been sending information to parents about COVID-19 in their newsletters (News You Choose). For the schools’ messages, please use information from the superintendent’s messages to the community (use the latest information), information posted to the FCPS website https://www.fcps.edu/news/coronavirus-update or other reputable sources such as the Fairfax County Health Dept. or the CDC.

   SAMHSA provides a great resource you can share with staff to support mental health and support for coping with stress given the concerns around COVID-19. https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4885.pdf

4. **Parents are asking why we aren’t closing schools? What can I say to them?**

   As schools in other parts of the U.S. and in other countries are closing, we know this is a question that is being asked.

   There are no hard and fast rules on what the Fairfax County Health Department will recommend if we do start to see cases of Covid-19 directly impact our
schools. It is entirely situational, and we would be focused on containment and mitigation strategies to prevent the spread of disease.

Most schools directly impacted elsewhere are closing for one or two days – deep cleaning and disinfecting and then reopening – based on guidance from their Health Department. Other districts are closing schools for an extended period of time.

The Fairfax County Health Dept has not recommended closing schools at this time. They are in the process of reviewing and updating our existing response plan. FCPS will share the approved plan with the public in the next few days.

The plan addresses the specific activities necessary to keep schools open and operating while providing a clean and safe environment during an outbreak and the essential functions that must be performed by FCPS, if schools are closed.

**Self-Quarantine**

5. **One of my staff members has a member of their household under self-quarantine. Can they come to work?**

FCPS is working with the Fairfax County Health Department (FCHD) and closely monitoring the health crisis globally associated with novel coronavirus infections (COVID-19), as well as any impact it may have locally. We recognize the growing concern about the spread of COVID-19 to our region.

If a staff member has not traveled to China, Iran, Italy or South Korea, and their household contact returned from any one of those countries and is now in a 14 day self-quarantine status, but has no symptoms of COVID-19 infection (fever, cough, or difficulty breathing), the staff member has no limitations on attending school. Further questions may be addressed through the FCHD Communicable Disease call center during business hours at 703-267-3511.

6. **One of my student’s parents is under self-quarantine but is still planning to send their children to school. Is that ok?**

FCPS is working with the Fairfax County Health Department (FCHD) and closely monitoring the health crisis globally associated with novel coronavirus infections (COVID-19), as well as any impact it may have locally. We recognize the growing concern about the spread of COVID-19 to our region.
If the student has not traveled to China, Iran, Italy or South Korea and their household contact returned from any one of those countries and is now in a 14 day self-quarantine status, but has no symptoms of COVID-19 infection (fever, cough, or difficulty breathing), there are no limitations for them to attend school. Further questions may be addressed through the FCHD Communicable Disease call center during business hours at 703-267-3511.

7. **How will leave be handled for a staff member required to self-quarantine?**

Any employee who has received notification that they should self-quarantine should contact their Benefit Services representative in Human Resources at 571-423-3000. Arrangements have been made to place these employees on paid administrative leave after a review of orders from a healthcare provider or appropriate travel documents. This applies to all employees eligible for leave and contracted hourly employees.

8. **How should we handle instruction and attendance for students required to self-quarantine?**

For any student self-quarantining based on the CDC guidance, schools should continue to provide assignments as they do for any other extended absence. Students who are self-quarantining should not be withdrawn from school and asked to re-register.

Based on guidance from VDOE, two new codes have been created in SIS for COVID-19 related absences. CVC should be used for quarantined situations of confirmed cases of illness/exposure; CVC will be considered an excused absence. For users who have access to attendance in SIS, the codes have been added to the existing drop-down list of absence codes/descriptions. Detailed information will be provided to users regarding the use of these new codes and recording more than 15 days of absence.

For information on how to code students who are being kept home by parents out of concern, and not required to self-quarantine based on CDC or Health Department guidance, see question 11 below.

9. **Will students who are required to self-quarantine be counted against a school’s chronic absenteeism measure?**
VDOE is going to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the Commonwealth, each school-division, and individual schools. Any adjustments to chronic absenteeism metrics, waivers, or state appeals will be addressed once the impact of the virus is known.

10. How are we validating the required dates for student/staff self-quarantine due to overseas travel to areas identified by the CDC?

Students/staff who are being monitored by the health department will be provided with documentation stating that the quarantine is completed. Students should share that documentation with the front office or the principal. Staff should be prepared to share documentation with HR and their principal.

For students/staff who have responded to the travel questionnaire, the date of return to school would be 14 days from the entry date back into the US. For students, that date would be validated by the SIA or the registrar.

For staff who have received quarantine requests upon re-entry to the U.S., please contact the disability and leave section of the office of Benefit Services at 571-423-3200. Travel documents in support of administrative leave for the quarantine period are required to validate quarantine and provide administrative leave where possible. These travel documents include an itinerary showing international travel locations, dates of travel and the associated boarding passes.

Health Questions

11. What are the symptoms of Covid-19?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are on the CDC website and include: fever, cough, and shortness of breath. [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html)

12. How should we respond to any students or staff members who present with Coronavirus-like illness? (information in 3/9/2020 Actiongram)

In an abundance of caution, principals or designees are asked to do the following to prepare and react quickly should a student or staff member present with symptoms of a Coronavirus-like illness, or have a travel history to China, Iran, Italy or South Korea:
Identify one room, with a door, that will serve as a designated area should a student or staff member exhibit symptoms of a Coronavirus-like illness. The health room cannot be used for this purpose.

Identify 2-3 staff members in their building who will be responsible for the student (s) who may exhibit symptoms of a Coronavirus-like illness or have a travel history to the above countries. These staff members will be provided with appropriate personal protective equipment. The student (s) will remain in the designated room until such time that they can be picked up by their parent or guardian.

Principals may use their discretion as to which room should be designated.

13. A parent has informed me that they do not want to send their child to school based on concerns about COVID-19. The student is not required to self-quarantine based on CDC or Health Department guidance. How should I respond?

Currently, there is no reason to keep healthy children home from school. There are no cases of COVID-19 in our schools. If there is a case, FCPS and the health department will determine appropriate next steps regarding any cancellation decisions. Schools should work with families to encourage attendance in school.

Situations involving medically fragile students will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Parents/guardians of medically-fragile students who have concerns about their child attending school should be encouraged to reach out to the primary care physician for advice regarding keeping their student home from school. For additional guidance on these cases, please email c19questions@fcps.edu

If a parent chooses not to send their child to school because of concerns about COVID-19, and not for a medical reason, the CVQ code should be used in SIS for attendance purposes; CVQ will be considered an unexcused absence. For users who have access to attendance in SIS, the codes have been added to the existing drop-down list of absence codes/descriptions. Detailed information will be provided to users regarding the use of these new codes and recording more than 15 days of absence.

For students coded as CVQ, schools should provide work for the student, as practicable, and continue to monitor the situation. Parents may also be encouraged to consider home instruction to ensure continuity of and access to instruction. Below is information about home instruction that can be provided to families, as needed.

In accordance with Section 22.1-254.1 of the Code of Virginia, any parent may elect to provide home instruction for his or her school-age child in lieu of school attendance. For parents who elect to provide home instruction for their student,
they may visit the following website for detailed information regarding the requirements and how to follow-up: https://www.fcps.edu/registration/home-instruction

14. I have a staff member who does not want to come to work. How should I respond?

Based on guidance from the CDC and Fairfax Department of Health, FCPS schools are open. Currently FCPS has not been made aware of a need for employees to stay away from the workplace. Employees should continue to attend work and FCPS will continue to monitor advice provided by the CDC and the Fairfax Department of Health to ensure that we are well-informed to make alternative decisions should the situation arise.

Employees with health challenges should ensure they are consulting with their treating providers if they have concerns about a change in their ability to perform the essential duties of their job.

If a staff member has a preexisting health condition or is otherwise medically fragile, please have them contact the Office of Equity and Employee Relations for potential accommodations under the ADA. HR will continue to work with employees with a documented disability impacting their ability to work through the ADA accommodations process. Information and forms are found here: https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/adaform.pdf. Additionally, the Office of Benefit Services can assist with varied leave processes and leave documentation requirements.

15. I feel uncomfortable asking staff members to manage the designated separate room. They are not trained health professionals and could be putting their own health at risk.

Staff assigned to provide support to the designated room will be provided with gloves and masks as recommended. The staff will not be managing the room, they will be observing the student in the same manner as would occur with an ill student waiting for parental pickup in the front office.

With the exception of school administrative personnel and persons employed by School Boards who have the specific duty to deliver health-related services, no licensed instructional employee, instructional aide, or clerical employee shall be disciplined, placed on probation, or dismissed on the basis of such employee's refusal to (i) perform nonemergency health-related services for students or (ii)
obtain training in the administration of insulin and glucagon. However, instructional aides and clerical employees may not refuse to dispense oral medications. https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter14/section22.1-274/

16. **What types of protective supplies do we need to order to staff the room for coronavirus-like symptoms?**

Face masks and gloves are the recommended protective supplies. Face masks will be provided to the schools by the health department. Designated office staff should order gloves consistent with those currently on the health room inventory list.

17. **Should we be discouraging handshakes and other contact in the schools? Are there any directions for athletic events?**

The Fairfax County Health Department recommends fist bumps or elbow taps for greetings. Student athletic teams will be encouraged to follow these recommendations as well and the following guidance was sent to DSAs today from VHSL:

*While the VHSL recognizes good sportsmanship is one of our core values, the VHSL is asking its players, coaches and referees to not engage in its traditional pregame and postgame handshakes at the state basketball semifinals and finals in order to limit skin-on-skin contact that could spread COVID-19.*

18. **Are students and staff allowed to wear masks in school? What should we tell parents and staff members who are asking?**

There are no restrictions from students or staff members from wearing masks at school. For your reference, the CDC guidance on the wearing of masks is below.

- CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
- Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for [health workers](#) and [people who are taking care of someone in close settings](#) (at home or in a healthcare facility).
19. Our suppliers are out of hand sanitizer. What should we do?

Facilities has ordered a large quantity of hand sanitizer, which is anticipated to arrive in two weeks. FTS is working on a distribution plan to schools.

Until our suppliers have hand sanitizer available again, we recommend making as much time for handwashing with soap and water as it is the best preventative measure to protect from illness. Hand sanitizer is a supplemental resource and the most important thing is to have students and staff wash their hands frequently.

20. I have been in contact with someone who has been in contact with someone who has COVID-19. What should I do?

People who are direct contacts of a COVID-19 case are at higher risk of this infection. However, being around someone who is a contact of a patient (rather than the patient themselves) does not increase your risk and you don't need to take any specific action or limit your movements. Like everyone, use good preventive behaviors such as covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands frequently, staying away from people who are ill and staying home if you are sick. But you can continue to go to work or school and are not at increased risk and do not pose a risk to others.

21. Do you have any specific guidance for people who are at high risk of severe illness such as older adults or persons with chronic illness or compromised immune systems?

People at higher risk of severe illness should be rigorous about taking everyday actions to reduce their risk: covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve rather than their hand, washing hands frequently, staying away from others who are sick, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces with a disinfectant. They also should avoid activities that put them at higher risk – defer non-essential travel to a location with the spread of disease in the community and not go on a cruise. At meetings and in public, try to stay further away from other people and adopt practices that reduce the spread of infection, for example instead of shaking hands, fist or elbow bump. For more information see the CDC site: High Risk for COVID Complications. Employees who have such concerns should consult with
their primary care physician for further advice.

**FCPS Sponsored Travel and Events**

**22. How is FCPS handling FCPS sponsored international trips and cultural exchanges with the ongoing concerns about Coronavirus?**

FCPS is suspending all international field trips and short-term international visitations through June 30. The CDC has issued additional guidance advising educational institutions to consider postponing or canceling upcoming student foreign exchange programs. This advice is motivated by an awareness that “students may face unpredictable circumstances, travel restrictions, and challenges in returning home or accessing health care while abroad.”

**23. How is FCPS handling FCPS sponsored domestic trips?**

Effective 3/11/20 through 4/12/20, the following FCPS sponsored travel programs have been adjusted:

- FCPS sponsored programs that include overnight student travel are canceled or postponed.

- FCPS sponsored day trips to US destinations identified by the CDC as having high numbers of COVID-19 cases are canceled or postponed through 4/12/20. As of 3/10/20, this includes the state of New York. The CDC website is updated on a daily basis and additional states may be added to this list. (ADD LINK)

Currently, there are no travel restrictions for locations within the US. FCPS is canceling these trips due to the fact that students may face unpredictable circumstances, travel restrictions, and challenges in returning home or accessing health care while traveling. A decision about any travel after 4/12/20 will be shared by 3/31/20.

FCPS is further consulting with DECA organizers for their event scheduled to take place after 4/12/2020 that has a registration deadline of 3/13/2020. Additional information is forthcoming. If you have questions about FCPS sponsored athletic travel, please contact Bill Curran.

There are currently no restrictions on FCPS sponsored staff domestic travel,
such as training or conferences.

Please remember to enter all of your remaining day and overnight student trips into the field trip system for the year to ensure we have an accurate account for all planned travel. If you have questions, please reach out to Risk Management.

Below is a DRAFT sample letter to support principals in communicating this information to staff and families.

In an abundance of caution, FCPS has made the difficult decision to cancel our upcoming trip to ___.

We realize this may be a disappointment and we pledge to try to find a way to reschedule this trip, if at all possible. On March 10, a decision was made that all FCPS-sponsored programs scheduled between March 11 and April 12 (that include overnight student travel) are cancelled or postponed.

Additionally, we have cancelled day trips to states that the CDC has identified as having widespread numbers of illness, to include New York. This may change as the number of cases fluctuates.

While FCPS regulation 5790 and FCPS Parental Permission Form FS-152 do not provide for refunds, we will work with our approved vendors to attempt to get refunds wherever possible.

We appreciate the continued patience and support of our students and families as this situation continues.

Principals may work with their community members and staff to attempt to get refunds for any canceled trip or seek options for rescheduling, if possible. Principals or their designees should contact their Region Analyst in FCPS Financial Services for support.

Since there are many different formats used to reserve hotels and book airfare, the Office of the Comptroller has researched different travel websites and airlines and has issued the guidance below based on our research as of March 9, 2020. Some websites and airlines may change their rules, but as of today this is what we have found.

**Airlines:** Most airlines are allowing flight changes to any flight without a change fee for the foreseeable future (see each airline for dates). Travelers that have purchased refundable tickets or flight insurance will be able to receive a refund following that airline’s rules for the refund. If the air fare was booked through a
travel website, you will need to follow the online vendors rules to apply for a refund (if available).

**Hotels:** If you reserve a hotel room you typically do not pay until you stay at the hotel. Some hotels and special room rates require a deposit. Most of these are refundable if you cancel within the appropriate time frame (usually 24 hours prior). Hotels rates that require payment in full at the time of reservation usually allow cancellations and refunds. Contact your hotel to determine what to do to receive a refund of any deposits or prepaid rooms. If you booked a hotel room through a travel website, you will need to follow the online vendors rules to apply for a refund (if available).

**Travel Websites:** We have looked at a few of the major travel websites. Each website has its own rules for cancellations. Below are a couple of links that explain what to do for cancellations and refunds (if available).

**Travelocity:** [https://www.travelocity.com/service/#/articles/423/61/2569](https://www.travelocity.com/service/#/articles/423/61/2569)

**Expedia:** [https://www.expedia.com/service/#/articles/398/61/25643](https://www.expedia.com/service/#/articles/398/61/25643)

**24. Should schools cancel or postpone events that have a large number of community members participating in them? What about sporting events?**

The Fairfax County Health Department has not advised FCPS to cancel or reschedule community events or programs with large crowds. In some of our communities, concerns about large gatherings may detract from participation in school sponsored programs.

If a principal, in consultation with their community and staff, believes that an event will have low turnout due to community concerns, they may make a local decision to reschedule or cancel the event. We recommend using the language below (or similar language) to make clear that we are not canceling events due to COVID-19.

*Based on anticipated low community turnout, our school has decided to cancel/reschedule our ______ that was scheduled to take place on ______. I realize this may be a disappointment and we will work to reschedule this event at a time when we expect better attendance at the event. Thank you for your patience and understanding.*

**25. I have students who are participating in work-based learning opportunities. Some of these are in medical facilities. How should we proceed?**
Currently, there are no restrictions for student participation in work-based learning experiences at non-FCPS locations. FCPS is continuing to work closely with the Fairfax County Health Department, is following CDC guidance on large gatherings and travel, and is monitoring this evolving situation.

FCPS understands that some parents or guardians may have concerns regarding their child’s participation in work-based learning experiences that are located at non-FCPS locations during the school day. As with instructional field trips during the school day, if a student does not participate in a work-based learning experience during the school day, the school will provide an appropriate educational alternative.

If families have any questions regarding their student with underlying health issues, they should speak with their primary care physician regarding their student’s participation in work-based learning experiences.

**Sample response to parents:**

*FCPS understands that some parents or guardians may have concerns regarding their child’s participation in work-based learning experiences that are located at non-FCPS locations. As with instructional field trips during the school day, if a student does not participate in a work-based learning experience during the school day, the school will provide an appropriate educational alternative.*

**Translation of Information**

26. How is FCPS providing information to our speakers of other languages and their families to ensure they are receiving important updates?

Language Services is working with the FCPS Leadership Team to translate the public-facing FAQ document as quickly as possible. Translation requests are generally completed within 24 hours. PDFs are posted on the public website and eNotify messages have been sent out from The Office of Communication and Community Relations. Principals with additional translation/interpretation needs may contact Wil Lara at 571-423-4456 for translations and 571-423-4450 for Interpretations.

In addition to the services provided from the Language Services through DSS, parent liaisons will continue to support schools in communicating with parents through various channels such as emails, letters, and phone calls where applicable. Also, parents are reminded that our Parent Information phone lines
are available for our families to call and ask questions that they may have in their home language. These resources can be found here: https://www.fcps.edu/resources/family-engagement/parent-information-phone-lines

27. Are we providing translated information for custodians on our current cleaning protocols and updates on Covid-19?

Information that was sent to the custodians was shared in English and is currently being translated by Language Services. Once complete, it will be posted on our FCPS Intranet and shared in a future FAQ. Schools that need additional support should contact their Plant Operations Monitors. If you do not know who your Plant Operations Monitor is, please contact Justin Moss, Director of Facilities Management.

Cleaning

28. What cleaning protocols are in place for school buses, especially given the number of students from multiple schools and areas that access a given school bus?

Bus drivers are provided cleaning supplies, including all-purpose surface cleaner. Each driver and attendant are required to maintain a clean bus and are required to clean after each morning/afternoon run. Supervisors monitor the cleanliness of route buses on a regular basis.

In addition to our standard cleaning, the Office of Transportation Services will begin using a FCPS disinfectant cleaner on the interior surfaces of the buses. Specific areas for cleaning with this disinfectant will be frequently touched areas, such as handrails, seatbacks, and seat cushions. This additional cleaning measure is being taken to ensure the cleanest and healthiest environment possible for our students.

29. Are students allowed to use the disinfecting wipes? Are there any precautions we need to take if they can?

Students can use the disinfecting wipes. No precautions are necessary.

Response Plan
30. **One of my parents/staff members asked to see a copy of the FCPS Covid-19 response plan. What should I share?**

The plan continues to evolve based on CDC guidance, guidelines and recommendations and in partnership with the Fairfax County Health Department. The plan addresses three areas: the maintenance of school campuses and development of response plans for each, reducing the transmission of respiratory illness, and providing a safe and continuous learning environment.

The plan will be posted to the FCPS website once the Health Department approves it.

31. **Is ACE following the same procedures for students in their program as FCPS PreK-12 with regard to COVID-19?**

Yes, FCPS Adult and Community Education is following the same procedures as the PreK-12 program with regard to COVID-19.

32. **Is FCPS considering shutting down salad-bars at this time?**

There is no plan to stop existing salad-bar services at this time. FCPS will continue to follow any guidance from the Fairfax County Health Department as it relates to food services.

**Covid-19 Resources for Principals**


Health Department Hotline: 703-267-3511

Covid-19 Principal Feedback Form: [https://tinyurl.com/fcpscovid19](https://tinyurl.com/fcpscovid19) (for sharing information you wanted added to the FAQ or things we should consider in our response plan)

Principal email address for C-19 questions that cannot be addressed by the FAQ and do not require referral to the Health Department: [c19questions@fcps.edu](mailto:c19questions@fcps.edu) Please do not share this email.