2019 Novel Coronavirus: What Campuses Need to Know

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is closely monitoring an outbreak caused by a novel (new) coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Chinese authorities identified the new coronavirus, which has resulted in hundreds of confirmed cases in China, including cases outside Wuhan, with additional cases being identified in a growing number of countries internationally, including in the United States and Canada. There are ongoing investigations to learn more.

About 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Transmission
There are indications that person-to-person spread is occurring, most likely between close contacts (as in the case of SARS). It’s not clear yet how easily 2019-nCoV spreads from person-to-person. It’s important to know this in order to better understand the risk associated with this virus. Officials are working to understand implications of possible transmission from infected but asymptomatic persons.

Prevention
There is currently no vaccine to prevent 2019-nCoV infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Currently there are no additional precautions recommended for the general public to take. However, as a reminder, CDC recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Get a flu vaccine.

These are every day habits that can help prevent the spread of several viruses. CDC also has specific guidance for travelers.

Key Points for Campuses

- Campuses should follow guidance offered by CDC, which is evolving rapidly in response to the current coronavirus threat, and contact local or state health departments for additional guidance.
Many strains of coronaviruses are ubiquitous and are often responsible for symptoms attributed to the "common cold." 2019-nCoV is a concern due to the lack of knowledge about it and two previous coronavirus outbreaks resulting from the coronaviruses SARS and MERS.

Similarly, coronavirus 2019-nCoV seemingly causes no or mild symptoms in some people infected by it.

Currently, the biggest threat for spread of 2019-nCoV on campuses comes from visitors and tourists, and campus officials should be particularly mindful of delegations visiting from China.

Currently, there is no basis for changing business as usual regarding housing, campus events, and other circumstances under which large groups of people will be gathering. There is no indication for use of masks by the general public at this time.

Campuses should begin assessing planned travel and study abroad programs for the winter and spring for viability and safety.

It is important to note that campuses should continue to remain vigilant regarding seasonal influenza and to promote vaccination and prevention using the preventative actions outlined previously in this brief. CDC estimates that so far this season there have been at least 15 million flu illnesses in the U.S., 140,000 hospitalizations, and 8,200 deaths from flu. In the U.S., flu is currently a far bigger threat than coronavirus.

For additional resources for campuses and campus health centers, please visit ACHA’s 2019-nCoV webpage.

Guidance for Campus Health Professionals

Campus health professionals should be on alert for patients coming to the college or university health clinic with fever and respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) who have been in Wuhan during the 14 days before illness onset. If you evaluate any patient you suspect may be infected with 2019-nCoV, implement infection control precautions and notify your local public health authorities immediately. Suspect patients should be asked to wear a surgical mask as soon as they are identified and be evaluated in a private room with the door closed. Health care personnel entering the room should use standard precautions, contact precautions, airborne precautions (N-95 respirator), and use eye protection (e.g., goggles or a face shield).


Interim guidance for health care professionals, including CDC’s Health Alert Notice, guidance on clinical signs and symptoms, and infection prevention and control recommendations, is available here.

Campus Communications

Provide information to the campus community on: the status of the disease on campus, including if no cases have occurred; travel advice; self-care; personal preparedness planning; proper hand washing techniques and cough etiquette; federal, state, and local public health resources; and how/when to access services in case of illness.

As part of educational outreach on campus, students should be made aware of when and how to seek treatment. Inform students that if they have symptoms of fever, cough, and/or difficulty breathing and in the last 14 days traveled to China or had close contact with someone who had traveled to China, they should seek medical care right away. Instruct students and others to call ahead before arriving at the health center, emergency room, etc.

A customizable template for communicating with students and others on campus is available here.