
March 6 Coronavirus Update

The Westport Public Schools <do_not_reply@westportps.org>
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Dear Westport Families,

In a continuing effort to update families with respect to Coronavirus (COVID-19), this letter is intended to address several questions and concerns that have been raised since our last correspondence on February 27th. Toward the objective of mitigating the spread of infection in our schools, we have been carefully monitoring new developments through close collaboration with the State Department of Public Health and the Westport Weston Health District. In that we are in the midst of a rapidly moving set of circumstances, our approaches to preventing the spread of COVID-19 are subject to change. We will do our best to communicate any changes to our school programs or mitigation procedures in a timely fashion.

Handwashing

As of Monday, March 11th, immediately after recess, and prior to eating lunch in the cafeteria, all students in grades K-5 will wash their hands with soap and water. Logistically, this will be accomplished by teachers and paraprofessionals bringing students to restrooms situated throughout the building. At the elementary schools, school nurses have done handwashing instruction and disease prevention strategies through morning announcements or through individual classroom sessions.

At Stepping Stones, our preschool students, assisted by teachers and paraprofessionals, will wash their hands with soap and water after morning unpacking, before snack and lunch, after coming in from the playground, and after using the bathroom.

At the middle school, staff encourage students to wash their hands with soap and water, and students are reminded to do so through digital messaging throughout the building.

At the high school, students have been reminded of everyday preventive practices, including hand washing, during Connections, their advisory period.

At all district schools, signage is present in restrooms and other locations, as a reminder about the importance of hand washing.

Cleaning Agents

Cleaning agents used in our schools are consistent with state requirements and meet the “green” standards established by our district “Tools-for-Schools” program. The custodial staff uses PC-103, which is effective against COVID-19 as are the hand wipes utilized by custodial staff. Yesterday, March 5th, we received authorization from the State Department of Administrative Services to use chlorine bleach disinfectants. We will be procuring chlorine based products as another level of protection to aid in the control or spread of the virus.

Throughout the district, surface areas in classrooms, such as desks, are cleaned nightly with disposable wipes.

We have placed alcohol-based (70%) hand sanitizers in all of our classrooms for student and teacher use. If they have the inclination to do so, parents should feel free to provide their children with a bottle of hand sanitizer or disinfectant wipes for their children to use in school.

Attached is a memorandum regarding district cleaning protocols in our schools, placed on our district website on March 3rd.

Bus Transportation

Dattco, our bus transportation carrier, is responding to COVID-19 through increasing its bus cleaning efforts. For example, they have informed us that school bus interior “high traffic” surfaces will be wiped down on a regular basis with disinfectant sprays and disposable towels. On the personnel side, drivers who exhibit or report illness symptoms will be encouraged not to report to work until they are asymptomatic.

School Closings

As the State Department of Education has directed: “Absent an emergency declaration from the Office of the Governor or Federal Government, school closures are local decisions made by the school district in coordination with and at the direction of the local health officials.”

In the Westport Public Schools, we monitor student health on a district-wide basis by tracking student absentee rates as well as monitoring students with influenza-like illness. Students with influenza-like symptoms are sent to our school nurses, evaluated, and if warranted, parents are called to take their children home.

Our protocols and approach to COVID-19 are being implemented and updated through close consultation with the Westport Weston Health District. It is impossible to plan for every possibility, as each situation is unique; however, if a student or staff member at a particular school is determined to have COVID-19, it is highly likely that the impacted school would be closed for 14 days. Siblings of students with COVID-19 who attend other schools in our district would be requested and expected to remain at home for 14 days. Likewise, staff members with family members or close contacts that are determined to have COVID-19, will be requested and expected to remain at home for 14 days.

Given that each situation is different, our response to specific situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Decisions will be made in consultation with the Westport Weston Health District, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the Connecticut State Department of Public Health.

Continuity of Teaching and Learning

Under the leadership of Dr. Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, and in conjunction with Principals, Curriculum Coordinators and Teachers, we are developing a number of strategies that, in the event of a school or district closing, will allow for a degree of home-based instructional continuity. Because we are asking our educators to plan for the possibility of school closings at the same time they are providing day-to-day instruction, we will have to redeploy some staff members, during the course of the day, in order to provide them with time to plan.

We will continue to share pertinent information with respect to this rapidly evolving challenge. In the interim, we encourage all families and staff members to take part in every-day preventative practices toward the objective of helping us maintain a healthy school environment.

Below are helpful links for families, which includes information tips for talking with children about an infectious disease outbreak.

Sincerely,

David Abbey
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Suzanne Levasseur, MSN, CPNP, APRN
Supervisor of Health Services

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Public-Health-Preparedness/Main-Page/2019-Novel-Coronavirus>

[Talking With Children Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)

[Cleaning Protocol.pdf](#)

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