

# Interim Guidance for Administrators of U.S. Institutions of Higher Education

## Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

### Summary of Recent Changes

Revisions were made on March 18 to reflect the following:

- Clarification of appropriate mitigation strategies, based on level of community transmission of COVID-19 and presence of COVID-19 cases within the IHE.
- Who is this guidance for?
- Why is this guidance being issued?
- What is the role of IHE in responding to COVID-19?
- How should IHE prepare for, and respond to, COVID-19?
- When a confirmed case has been on campus, regardless of community transmission
- When there is no community transmission (preparedness phase)
- When there is minimal to moderate community transmission
- When there is substantial community transmission
- Institutions of higher education (IHE), working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases, and protecting vulnerable students, staff, and faculty to help ensure a safe and healthy learning environment.
- Guidance for IHE is organized into three categories based on the level of community transmission: 1) when there is no community transmission (preparedness phase), 2) when there is minimal to moderate community transmission, and 3) when there is substantial community transmission. Consult with your local health department to determine what level of transmission is currently occurring in your community.
- Guidance is also provided for when a confirmed case has entered an IHE, regardless of community transmission.
- All decisions about implementing IHE-based strategies (e.g., class suspensions, event cancellations, other social distancing measures) should be made in collaboration with local health officials.

Older adults and persons with severe underlying health conditions are at increased risk of more serious illness after contracting COVID-19. Priority should be given to ensuring the safety of these groups of people. For more information on those at increased risk of more serious illness due to COVID-19, go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>.



This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Please check the following CDC website periodically for updated interim guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 into US communities. IHE play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, IHE should take steps to disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their IHE community. IHE should prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their students and staff should local health officials identify community transmission.

IHE should continue to collaborate, share information, and review plans with local health officials to help protect the whole IHE community, including those with special health needs. IHE plans should be designed to complement other community mitigation strategies to protect high risk populations and the healthcare system and minimize disruption to teaching and learning and protect students, staff, and faculty from social stigma and discrimination. Plans should build on everyday practices (e.g., encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely) that include strategies for before, during, and after a possible outbreak.

## Who is this guidance for?

This interim guidance is intended for administrators of public and private institutions of higher education (IHE). IHE include a diverse set of American colleges and universities: 2- or 4-year; public, private non-profit, or private for-profit; and comprehensive, research-focused, or special mission. IHE administrators (e.g., presidents, deans, provosts) are individuals who make policies and procedures, set educational aims and standards, and direct programming of institutions of higher education.

## Why is this guidance being issued?

This guidance will help IHE and their partners understand how to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 among students, faculty, and staff. It also aims to help IHE react quickly should a case be identified in the IHE or if there is spread within the community in which the IHE is located. The guidance includes considerations to help administrators plan for the continuity of teaching, learning, and research if there is community spread of COVID-19 and address concerns related to COVID-19 associated stigma.

## What is the role of IHE in responding to COVID-19?

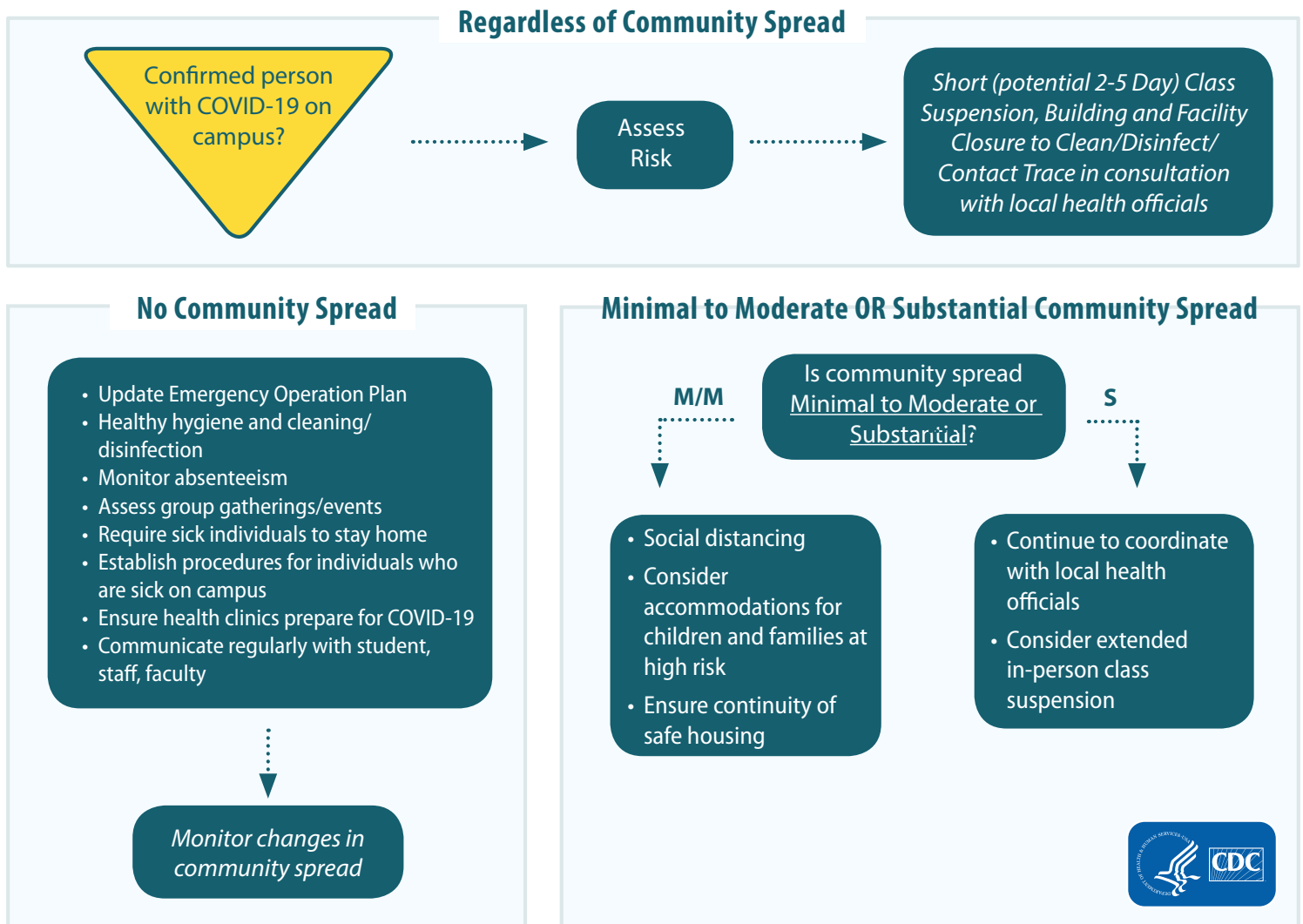
IHE, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of disease. IHE's efforts will help ensure students, staff, and faculty have safe and healthy environments in which to learn and work. IHE welcome students, staff, faculty, and visitors from throughout the community. All of these people may have close contact in IHE settings, often sharing spaces, equipment, and supplies.

Some individuals are experiencing stigma and discrimination in the United States related to COVID-19. This includes people of Chinese and Asian descent, as well as some returning travelers and emergency responders who may have been exposed to the virus. It is important for IHE to provide accurate and timely information about COVID-19 to students, staff, and faculty to minimize the potential for stigma on college and university campuses. It is also important to provide mental health support to promote resilience among those groups affected by stigma regarding COVID-19. CDC has information IHE can share to reduce COVID-19 associated fear and stigma.

## How should IHEs prepare for, and respond to, COVID-19?

IHE should be prepared for COVID-19 outbreaks in their local communities and for individual exposure events to occur in facilities, regardless of the level of community transmission, for example, a case associated with travel. The following decision tree can be used to help IHE administrators determine which set of mitigation strategies may be most appropriate for their current situation.

### Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) Decision Tree



### When a confirmed case has been on campus, regardless of community transmission

Any IHE in any community might need to implement short-term building closure procedures regardless of community spread **if an infected person has been on campus**. If this happens, CDC recommends the following procedures, regardless of level of community spread:

- ✓ **Coordinate with local health officials.** Once learning of a COVID-19 case in someone who has been on the campus, immediately reach out to local public health officials. These officials will help administrators determine a course of action for their IHE.
- ✓ **Work with local public health officials to determine cancellation of classes and closure of buildings and facilities.** IHE administrators should work closely with their local health

officials to determine if a short-term closure (for 2-5 days) of all campus buildings and facilities is needed. In some cases, IHE administrators, working with local health officials, may choose to only close buildings and facilities that had been entered by the individual(s) with COVID-19. This initial short-term class suspension and event and activity (e.g., club meetings; on-campus sport, theater, and music events) cancellation allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the IHE. This allows the local health officials to help the IHE determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.

- Local health officials' recommendations for the duration and extent of class suspensions, building and facility closures, and event and activity cancellations should be made on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the community.
- Discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering or socializing anywhere. This includes group childcare arrangements, as well as gathering at places like a friend's house, a favorite restaurant, or the local coffee shop.

✓ **Communicate with students, staff, and faculty.** Coordinate with local health officials to communicate dismissal decisions and the possible COVID-19 exposure.

- This communication to the IHE community should align with the communication plan in the emergency operations plan.
- Plan to include messages to counter potential stigma and discrimination.
- In a circumstance where there is a confirmed COVID-19 case that has been on campus, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student or staff member as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, as applicable.

✓ **Clean and disinfect thoroughly.**

- Close off areas used by the patient. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area and then begin cleaning and disinfection.
- Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the COVID-19 patient focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Additional information on cleaning and disinfection of community facilities such as schools can be found on CDC's website.

● **Make decisions about extending the class suspension and event and activity cancellation.**

Temporarily suspending classes is a strategy to stop or slow the further spread of COVID-19 in communities.

- When classes are suspended, IHE administrators should work closely with local public health officials to determine if some buildings and facilities may stay open for staff or faculty that are not ill while students temporarily stop attending in-person classes.
- **IHE administrators should work in close collaboration with local public health officials and the IHE's university system to make class suspension and [large event and activity cancellation decisions](#).** IHE are not expected to make decisions about suspending classes or canceling events on their own. IHE can seek specific guidance from local health officials to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps. The nature of these actions (e.g., geographic scope, duration) may change as the local outbreak situation evolves.

- Administrators should seek guidance from local health officials to determine when students, staff, and faculty should return to campus and what additional steps are needed for the IHE community. In addition, students, staff, and faculty who are well but are taking care of or share a home with someone with a case of COVID-19 should follow instructions from local health officials to determine when to return to campus.

✓ **Implement strategies to continue education and other related supports for students.**

○ **Ensure continuity of education and research.**

- Review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching, learning, and research. Implement e-learning plans and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate.
- Ensure continuity plans address how to temporarily postpone, limit, or adapt research-related activities (e.g., study recruitment or participation, access to labs) in a manner that protects the safety of researchers, participants, facilities, and equipment.
- Consider the following approaches:
  - Use of existing infrastructure and services (e.g., Blackboard, Skype, Zoom) to support efficient transition of classes from in-person to distance-based formats. This may include using strategies such as faculty check-ins, recorded class meetings or lectures, and live class meetings.
  - Other student support services such as online library services, print materials available online, phone- or internet-based counseling support, or study groups enabled through digital media.
- IHE will need to determine, in consultation with their university system:
  - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train faculty to do so.
  - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff.
  - How to deal with the potential lack of students' access to computers and the Internet at home or in temporary housing.

○ **Ensure continuity of safe housing.**

- **Work in close collaboration with local public health officials to make all decisions related to on-campus housing.**
- **If cases of COVID-19 have not been identified among residents of on-campus community housing**, students may be allowed to remain in on-campus housing. In this situation, educate housing residents on the precautions they should take to help protect themselves when there is community spread of COVID-19. Residents should follow any more specific recommendations provided by local health officials. Any on-campus resident who may have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should follow instructions provided by local public health officials, including possible temporary relocation to alternate housing for self-quarantine and monitoring for symptoms.
- **If cases of COVID-19 have been identified among residents of on-campus community housing, work with local public health officials to take additional precautions.** Individuals with COVID-19 may need to be moved to temporary housing locations. These individuals will need to self-isolate and monitor for worsening symptoms according to the guidance of local health officials. [Close contacts](#) of the individuals with COVID-19 may also need temporary housing so that they can self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms. Consult with local health officials to determine when, how, and where to move ill residents. Information on providing home care to individuals with COVID-19 who do not require hospitalization is available on [CDC's website](#).
- **Residents identified with COVID-19 or identified as contacts of individuals with COVID-19 should not necessarily be sent to their permanent homes off-campus.**



Sending sick residents to their permanent homes could be unfeasible, pose logistical challenges, or pose risk of transmission to others either on the way to the home or once there. IHE should work with local public health officials to determine appropriate housing for the period in which they need to self-isolate and monitor for symptoms or worsening symptoms.

- **Remember to consider all types of IHE-affiliated housing when making response plans.** Distinct housing types (e.g., residence halls, apartments, fraternity and sorority houses) and situations (e.g., housing owned and run by the IHE, housing on the IHE campus but not run by the IHE) may require tailored approaches.
- **Ensure any staff remaining to support students in on-campus housing receive necessary training to protect themselves and residents from spread of COVID-19.** Staff should also be trained on how to respond if a resident becomes ill. Adequate cleaning and personal hygiene supplies should be made available.
- **Ensure continuity of meal programs.**
  - Consult with local health officials to determine strategies for modifying food service offerings to the IHE community.
  - Consider ways to distribute food to students, particularly those who may remain on campus, while classes or other events and activities are dismissed.
  - If there is minimal to moderate or substantial community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid food distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bagged lunches or meal delivery.
  - If on-campus housing residents have been relocated to temporary alternative housing, consider how meals can be provided to these students. Work with local public health officials to determine strategies for providing meals to residents with COVID-19 or who are being monitored because of contact with persons with COVID-19.
  - Ensure any staff remaining on campus to support food services receive necessary training to protect themselves and those they serve from spread of COVID-19.
- **Consider if, and when, to stop, scale back, or modify other support services on campus.**
  - Consider alternatives for providing students with essential medical, social, and mental health services. Identify ways to ensure these services are provided while classes are dismissed or students are in temporary housing.
  - Identify other types of services provided to students, staff, and faculty (e.g., library services, cleaning services). Consider ways to adapt these to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission while maintaining services deemed necessary.

## When there is no community transmission (preparedness phase)

The most important thing to do now is **plan and prepare**. IHE administrators should reinforce healthy practices among their students, staff, and faculty. As the global outbreak evolves, IHE should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks in their communities. IHE need to **be ready** in the event COVID-19 does appear in their communities. Here are some strategies:

- ✓ **Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).** This should be done in collaboration with local public health departments, the IHE’s university system, and other relevant partners. Focus on components, or annexes, of the plans that address infectious disease outbreaks.
  - Ensure the plan includes strategies to reduce the spread of a wide variety of infectious diseases (e.g., seasonal influenza). This includes strategies for social distancing and IHE dismissal that may be used to stop or slow the spread of infectious disease. The plan should also include strategies for continuing education, meal programs, and other related services in the event of IHE dismissal.
  - Ensure the plan emphasizes preventive actions for students and staff. Emphasize actions individuals

can take, including staying home when sick, appropriately covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and washing hands often.

- CDC has workplace resources including guidance posters with messages for staff about [staying home when sick](#) and how to [avoid spreading germs at work](#).
- Include procedures in the EOP for how to ensure safe housing for students.
- Reference key resources while reviewing, updating, and implementing the EOP.
  - Multiple federal agencies have developed resources on school planning principles and a 6-step process for creating plans to build and continually foster safe and healthy school communities before, during, and after possible emergencies. IHE may find this [guidance for developing high-quality emergency operations](#) plans helpful.
  - Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center's [website](#) contains free resources, trainings, and TA for schools, including IHE, and their community partners, including many tools and resources on emergency planning and response to infectious disease outbreaks.

✓ **Develop information-sharing systems with partners.**

- Institutional information systems should be used for day-to-day reporting on information such as absenteeism or changes in student health center traffic to detect and respond to an outbreak. Remember that IHE are not expected to screen students, staff, or faculty to identify cases of COVID-19. If a community (or more specifically, an IHE) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.
- Local health officials should be a key partner in information sharing.

✓ **Reinforce healthy hygiene practices.**

- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](#) and information on [proper handwashing technique](#).
- Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissue) to support healthy hygiene practices.

✓ **Intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts.**

- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops). Clean with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. For disinfection most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
  - A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Provide disposable wipes to staff and faculty so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down before use.
- Ensure adequate supplies to support cleaning and disinfection practices.

✓ **Monitor and plan for absenteeism.**

- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Students, staff, and faculty should not attend class or work when sick. Allow them to stay home to care for sick household members. Make accommodations

(e.g., extended due dates, electronic submission of assignments), as possible, for individuals who may be temporarily unable to attend class due to restrictions placed on them related to possible exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.

- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff and faculty.
  - Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your institution and on your campus among students, staff, and faculty. Consider identifying and implementing processes for faculty and IHE leadership to report noticeable changes in absenteeism, even if subjective, to a designated administrator.
  - Alert local health officials about large increases in student, staff, and faculty absenteeism or substantial increases in student health center traffic due to respiratory illnesses (like the common cold or the “flu,” which have symptoms similar to symptoms of COVID-19).
  - Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching, learning, and research.
- ✓ **Assess group gatherings and events. Consider postponing non-critical gatherings and events.**
- Ensure you have a clear understanding of all upcoming gatherings and large events for your IHE (e.g., special performances, athletic events, award banquets). Give special consideration to events that might put students, staff, or their families in close proximity to others from communities that may have identified cases of COVID-19 or include populations at increased risk of severe illness with COVID-19.
  - [Consider whether any of these events should be canceled](#). Speak with local health officials to help determine the best approach.
- ✓ **Require sick students, staff, and faculty to stay home. Establish procedures for students, staff, and faculty who are sick (with any illness) on campus.**
- Establish procedures to ensure students, staff, and faculty who become sick (with any illness) on campus or arrive on campus sick are sent to their place of residence (e.g., on-campus room or apartment, off-campus housing) as soon as possible. Keep sick individuals separate from well individuals until they can leave. Sick residents of on-campus housing in communities with no identified COVID-19 and who are not believed to have been exposed to COVID-19 should avoid contact with well individuals while sick.
  - Establish procedures for how to re-house roommates of those that are sick.
- ✓ **Ensure IHE health clinics prepare for COVID-19.**
- Review CDC guidance to help healthcare facilities prepare for COVID-19. Guidance includes [steps to take now](#) and strategies for [preparing for community transmission](#) of COVID-19.
- ✓ **Create plans to communicate accurate and timely information to the IHE community.**
- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, students, and faculty without increasing fear and [stigma](#). Keeping the community informed with accurate information can counter the spread of misinformation and reduce the potential for fear and stigma.
  - Include strategies to communicate steps being taken by the IHE to prepare and how additional information will be shared.
  - Include strategies to communicate changes to usual campus schedules or functions.
  - Include strategies to communicate information IHE community members can use to [protect themselves](#) from infectious disease, including COVID-19.
- ✓ **Review CDC’s guidance for businesses and employers.**
- Review this CDC [guidance](#) to identify any additional strategies the IHE can use, given its role as an employer.



IHE administrators can support their IHE community by sharing COVID-19 informational resources with students, staff, and faculty. Coordinate with local health officials to determine what type of information is best to share with the IHE community. Consider sharing the following fact sheets and [information sources](#):

- ✓ Information about COVID-19 available through [state](#) and [local](#) health departments
- ✓ General fact sheets to help students, staff, faculty, and their families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:
  - [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19](#)
  - [Share facts about COVID-19 to help prevent stigma](#)
- ✓ CDC information for students, staff, and faculty who have recently traveled back to the United States from areas where CDC has identified community spread of COVID-19:
  - A list of countries where community spread of COVID-19 is occurring can be found on the CDC webpage: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#)

For guidance for students, staff, or faculty who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC's [FAQ for travelers](#) and COVID-19 travel [website](#). Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials. For specific guidance on foreign exchange and study abroad programs, see CDC's [guidance on student foreign travel for IHE](#). IHE can also consult with state and local public health officials. IHE may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose students and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19.

## When there is minimal to moderate community transmission

If local health officials report that there are multiple cases in the community, IHE may need to implement additional strategies in response to prevent spread in the IHE, but they should continue using the strategies they implemented when there was no community transmission. These additional strategies include:

- ✓ Coordinate with local public health officials. This should be a first step in making decisions about responses to the presence of COVID-19 in the community. Health officials can help an IHE determine which set of strategies might be most appropriate for their specific community's situation.
- ✓ Implement multiple social distancing strategies. Select strategies based on feasibility given the unique space and needs on IHE campuses. Not all strategies will be feasible for all IHE. IHE administrators are encouraged to think creatively about all opportunities to increase the physical space between students and limit interactions in large group settings. IHE may consider strategies such as:
  - Cancel large gatherings. Cancel activities and events such as athletic events or practices, or special performances for groups of 250 people or more. Cancel events for groups of 20 people or more if attendees are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19
  - Cancel or modify courses where students are likely to be in very close contact, such as lecture courses with close seating, or music or physical activity classes where students are likely to be in close proximity.
  - Increase space between desks. Where possible, rearrange desks to maximize the space between students. Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) to reduce transmission caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing).
  - Reduce congestion in the health clinic. For example, consider using the health clinic for students with flu-like symptoms and a satellite location for routine clinic visits (e.g., preventive screenings or annual exams).

- Consider if and how existing dining services should be scaled back or adapted. For example, an IHE may close some of or all its cafeterias/cafes, offering meal delivery or grab-and-go options to discourage students, staff, and faculty from gathering in group settings. Self-serve stations that require multiple students to touch the same equipment (e.g. cereal dispensers, ice cream dispensers) may be scaled back.
- ✓ **Consider ways to accommodate the needs of students and staff** at [higher risk of severe illness with COVID-19](#). Consider if and how to honor requests of students or staff who may have concerns about being on campus due to underlying medical conditions or those of others in their home.
- ✓ **Ensure continuity of safe housing.**
  - **Work in close collaboration with local health officials to make all decisions related to on-campus housing.**
  - **If cases of COVID-19 have not been identified among residents of on-campus community housing**, students may be allowed to remain in on-campus housing. In this situation, educate housing residents on the precautions they should take to help protect themselves when there is community spread of COVID-19. Residents should follow any more specific recommendations provided by local health officials.
- ✓ Help counter [stigma](#) and promote resilience on campus.
  - [Share facts](#) about COVID-19 through trusted dissemination channels to counter the spread of misinformation and mitigate fear.
  - Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people.
  - Develop plans to support students, staff, and faculty who may feel overwhelmed by COVID-19 and associated events on campus.
    - Ensure continuity of mental health services, such as offering remote counseling. Encourage students to call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) if they are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like wanting to harm themselves or others.

## When there is substantial community transmission

Additional strategies should be considered when there is substantial transmission in the local community in addition to those implemented when there is no, minimal, or moderate transmission. These strategies include:

- ✓ Continue to coordinate with local public health officials. If local health officials have determined there is substantial transmission of COVID-19 within the community, they will provide guidance to administrators on the best course of action for IHE. Mitigation strategies are expected to extend across organizations (e.g., K-12 schools, business, community and faith-based organizations) within the community, as they are not necessarily tied to cases within IHE.
- ✓ Consider extended in-person class suspension. In collaboration with local public health officials, implement extended class suspension and event/activity cancellations (e.g., suspension/cancellations for longer than two weeks). This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community. During extended class suspensions, also cancel extracurricular group activities and large events. Remember to implement strategies to ensure the continuity of education, research, and housing as well as meal programs and other essential services for students.