

With spring break fast approaching for Ohio schools, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), commonly known as the “coronavirus,” officially having reached the state, schools should make sure they are prepared for what they may encounter when everyone returns from break.

- **School-sponsored trips** – Consider whether trips should go forward based on the destination and mode of transport. Trips within the US and those via private ground transport (whether by chartered bus or individual cars) are lower risk than trips abroad or involving air transport. Still, districts may wish to consult with the travel companies and other vendors involved with planned trips regarding whether they have relaxed their cancellation policies and whether they are taking any additional precautions in light of the virus’s spread. Keep in mind that districts cannot take any action regarding privately sponsored trips, even if they involve district students or staff.
- **Employees generally** – Your district likely has employees who are planning to travel over spring break. If any employees travel to areas hit particularly hard by the coronavirus, they should anticipate needing to quarantine themselves upon return to the area. Additionally, there is the possibility of more widespread district or building closures. With that in mind, consider communicating the following information to your various employee groups.
 - Administrators – Administrative employees should be encouraged to take with them laptops or some other means of accessing district records in case they are unable to return to work immediately following spring break.
 - Teachers – Teachers should be encouraged to have lesson plans in place for at least two weeks after spring break in case they are quarantined and a substitute is in their classroom. Teachers should also be encouraged to consider lesson plans that can be easily converted to online materials and activities for students who are quarantined themselves, or in the event school is closed. Have open discussions with your teachers’ union regarding contingency plans for the virus, including how closure days will be handled. If online lessons are an option in your district, discuss this with the union and highlight the alternative will be making up hours over the summer.
 - Classified staff – Consider providing clerical staff with technology to perform some of their tasks from home if appropriate. For other classified staff, whose jobs require them to be on-site, remind them about procedures for calling off and for what happens in the event the district closes.

If employee, regardless of classification, ends up quarantined, you should be prepared with information regarding available leave. You want to incentivize self-reporting and caution, so employees should be permitted to use paid leave (whether sick, personal or vacation) during the time they are quarantined. Employees actually suffering from the virus should also have access to leave under FMLA if they qualify. Finally, for employees who may not have sufficient paid time available, consider providing up to two weeks of paid leave during the period of advised quarantine to encourage employees to comply with the recommendations from federal and state authorities. Employees who take advantage of that leave should be asked to provide documentation supporting the need for quarantine.

Finally, be sure to check your individual collective bargaining agreements for applicable provisions, including those regarding leaves and calamity days.

- **Students** – Students may also come into contact with the virus and may need to be quarantined. In the event a student is quarantined, request documentation confirming the need for the quarantine and, assuming the documentation is provided, consider the absences to be excused. Be sure to permit affected students to make up homework, projects and tests they miss during their absence. To the extent possible, encourage teachers to make work available to students remotely so students may keep up with their classes while they are out. Consider what, if any, accommodations could be available for students who are quarantined but do not have access to the Internet at home.

Stay in close contact with your county health departments for localized updates and to respond to any quarantine cases in your area. Just because a student or employee is quarantined **does not** mean you will need to close school(s). If closures are necessary, though, remember that they would be considered calamity days for the purposes of counting student hours and for determining which staff must be paid.

While these are general guidelines, many situations will require individualized responses based on the specific details of the case. As always, reach out to counsel if you have any questions about your legal rights or obligations related to the coronavirus.

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