

IREDELL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Iredell County Health Department

Date: March 13, 2020

To: Iredell County Workplaces, Schools and Facilities that serve High Risk Populations for COVID-19

From: Jane Hinson, Iredell County Health Director

Subject: NC DHHS Mitigation Guidance

COVID-19 was just declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. The number of cases in North Carolina and the United States continue to rise at an alarming rate on a daily basis. Because this is a new infection with no approved treatment or vaccine, it is imperative that we make every effort at the local level to prevent its spread.

I am asking you to closely review and implement the attached mitigation strategies that were released yesterday by the NC Department of Health & Human Services. Taking these proactive steps can help our community and reduce the rate of infection to high risk populations that include individuals 65 and older and those with medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes and weakened immune systems. These populations are most severely impacted when they become infected.

You can make decisions in your organization right now that will impact the long-term health and safety of Iredell County residents. I urge you to take these actions effective immediately while we are still in the early stages of managing this pandemic.

For up to date information on COVID-19, please visit the following websites:

NC DHHS-DPH: epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/2019nCoV.html

CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

Iredell County Health Department: <https://www.co.iredell.nc.us/161/Health-Department>

North Carolina Public Information Hotline: 1-866-462-3821

NC DHHS Mitigation Measures

3/12/2020

As the number of cases of COVID-19 rise in North Carolina and the United States, and with the designation of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organization, the state is responding with a whole government response. COVID-19 is a new infection that is particularly severe in older persons and those with medical conditions, such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and weakened immune systems.

At this time there are no approved treatments and no vaccine to prevent it. However, there are known methods to reduce and slow the spread of infection. Individuals can practice everyday prevention measures like frequent hand washing, staying home when sick, and covering coughs and sneezes. Community-based interventions can also help slow the spread of COVID-19. This includes measures collectively known as “social distancing.” Social distancing measures aim to reduce the frequency of contact and increase physical distance between persons, thereby reducing the risks of person-to-person transmission. These measures are most effective when implemented early in an epidemic. We are at a critical inflection point where we may have the opportunity to slow the spread of this epidemic by taking proactive steps now.

NC DHHS is making the following recommendations to reduce the spread of infection while we are still in an early stage in order to protect lives and avoid strain on our health care system. NC DHHS is making these recommendations for the next 30 days and will re-assess at that point.

The following recommendations pertain to persons statewide.

SYMPTOMATIC PERSONS

If you need medical care and have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or suspect you might have COVID-19, call ahead and tell your health care provider you have or may have COVID-19. This will allow them to take steps to keep other people from getting exposed. NC DHHS recommends that persons experiencing fever and cough should stay at home and not go out until their symptoms have completely resolved.

HIGH RISK PERSONS WITHOUT SYMPTOMS

NC DHHS recommends that people at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should stay at home to the extent possible to decrease the chance of infection

People at **high risk** include people:

- Over 65 years of age, or
- with underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes, or
- with weakened immune systems.

CONGREGATE LIVING FACILITIES

NC DHHS recommends that all facilities that serve as residential establishments for **high risk** persons described above should restrict visitors. Exceptions should include end of life care or other emergent situations determined by the facility to necessitate a visit. If visitation is allowed, the visitor should be screened and restricted if they have a respiratory illness or potential exposure to COVID-19. Facilities are encouraged to implement social distancing measures and perform temperature and respiratory symptom screening of residents and staff. These establishments include settings such as nursing homes, independent and assisted living facilities, correction facilities, and facilities that care for medically vulnerable children.

SCHOOLS

We do not recommend pre-emptive school closure at this time but do recommend that schools and childcare centers cancel or reduce large events and gatherings (e.g., assemblies) and field trips, limit inter-school interactions, and consider distance or e-learning in some settings.

Students at **high risk** should implement individual plans for distance or e-learning. School dismissals may be necessary when staff or student absenteeism impacts the ability to remain open. Short-term closures may also be necessary to facilitate public health investigation and/or cleaning if a case is diagnosed in a student or staff member.

WORKPLACE

NC DHHS recommends that employers and employees use teleworking technologies to the greatest extent possible, stagger work schedules, and consider canceling non-essential travel. Workplaces should hold larger meetings virtually, to the extent possible. Additionally, employers should arrange the workspace to optimize distance between employees, ideally at least six feet apart. Employers should urge **high risk** employees to stay home and urge employees to stay home when they are sick and maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits.

MASS GATHERINGS, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL EVENTS

NC DHHS recommends that organizers of events that draw more than 100 people should cancel, postpone, modify these events or offer online streaming services. These events include large gatherings where people are in close contact (less than 6 feet), for example concerts, conferences, sporting events, faith-based events and other large gatherings.

MASS TRANSIT

Mass transit operators should maximize opportunities for cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces. People should avoid using mass transit (e.g. buses, trains) while sick.

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