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Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19

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Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is a rapidly evolving public health situation. State and local PTAs must follow the direction and guidance of their respective health and education departments.

In order to assist and support the most vulnerable children and families, PTAs should reach out to their local school districts and departments of health to determine high-need areas and collaborate with community groups—such as food pantries—to provide essential services and support.

We have compiled a number of resources for our community to use to help navigate the pandemic.

How do I talk to my child about the Coronavirus?

Children, as well as adults, are likely to experience anxiety in this uncertain time. Several resources have been created by leading mental health experts on how to have age-appropriate, fact-based and reassuring conversations with you children about the outbreak and the steps they can take to stay healthy.

- How to Talk to Your Child about the Coronavirus, *Kids Health*
- Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource, *National Association of School Psychologists*
- Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), *National Child Traumatic Stress Network*



Where can I go for information on the Coronavirus and its impact on education and children?

There are several resources available for parents about the Coronavirus. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has resources to assist education leaders in protecting student privacy and ensuring students with disabilities continue to receive services required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during school closures due to the outbreak.

The ED also released important information for K-12 educators on flexibilities the Department could grant when it comes to the accountability standards required by law under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We particularly recommend reviewing COVID-19 ("Coronavirus") Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has additional guidance and further resources, including:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) webpage

- Guidance for School Settings
- Checklist for Teachers and Parents
- Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Childcare Programs

Colorín Colorado is a good resource for English Language Learners and their families, as well as educators. We particularly want to call attention to their Multilingual Coronavirus Resources for Schools.

What if I do not have internet access in my home? What is being done to support equitable access to the internet for student learning?

Several internet providers have announced that they will make their services available for free for households with K-12 and/or college students who don't already have internet through the company. Further installation fees may also be waived for new student households. Please contact your local internet provider for additional information.



National PTA has joined several other education groups in calling for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to temporarily allow schools to utilize E-Rate program funding to provide Wi-Fi hotspots or devices with Wi-Fi capability to students who lack internet access at home. This action would help ensure that all students can remotely continue their education during the current public health emergency.

The coronavirus pandemic is shining a bright light on the so-called “homework gap” experienced by 12 million students in this country. The gap refers to those students who do not have internet access at home and are unable to complete their homework—at a time when over 70% of educators assign schoolwork that requires the internet.

As a parent, how can I support learning at home?

Recognizing that not all families or children will have the resources to access and leverage digital learning opportunities, PTAs should work with their local school and district to understand what plans are in place or are being developed to equitably support student learning during school closures. PTAs can (and should!) work with schools to help develop student learning plans during school closures and help communicate these plans to families.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), has developed 10 Strategies for Online Learning During Coronavirus Outbreak. The Today Show has curated some free educational activities that students and families can engage in here.

What is being done to ensure vulnerable youth have access to school meals?

Nearly 22 million students depend on subsidized breakfasts and lunches served at schools. All Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) programs—including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs—have flexibilities and contingencies built-in to allow them to respond to on-the-ground realities in the event of a disaster or emergency situation. You can view the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Response to COVID-19 here.



PTAs should connect with their local schools and district to learn about the plans for meal distribution and how best to support and promote those efforts. Members of Congress have introduced bipartisan legislation, COVID-19 Child Nutrition Response Act to protect students' access to school meal benefits during school closures related to COVID-19.

What legislative action is Congress taking regarding the Coronavirus?

Legislation is currently pending in Congress. Specifically, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201) responds to the coronavirus outbreak by providing paid sick leave and free coronavirus testing, expanding food assistance and unemployment benefits, and requiring employers to provide additional protections for health care workers.

Additionally, members of Congress have introduced the Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act (H.R. 6275) which will provide needed resources to early childhood programs, K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. The legislation will provide \$3 billion dollars in grants to provide support services to students, including mental health and technology and funding to clean school facilities.

You can write to your elected officials about these and other bills using our Take Action Network.

What if I have concerns about end-of-year state testing?

The U.S. Department of Education has issued guidance on assessments and accountability. The Department of Education generally does not grant statewide waivers of assessment requirements under section 1111(b)(2) of the ESEA.

However, due to the unique circumstances that may arise as a result of COVID-19, such as a school closing during the entire testing window, it may not be feasible for a State to administer some or all of its assessments, in which case the Department would consider a targeted one-year waiver of the assessment requirements for those schools impacted by the extraordinary circumstances.



States with schools that must close due to the COVID-19 may also want to consider whether it is possible to adjust or extend the testing window to accommodate as many students as possible, including students in schools that were closed for some period. Please contact your state PTA and/or our SEA with questions about testing in your state.

What considerations should be taken if our state PTA must cancel or postpone meeting or state conventions?

It is important to evaluate several factors including the guidance provided by the federal government, the CDC, and state and local authorities. The decision to cancel or postpone an event is complex and will vary based on the timing and type of event. **There is no one set answer to this dilemma.**

On March 15, 2020, the CDC, in accordance with its guidance for large events and mass gatherings, recommends that for the next eight weeks, organizers (whether groups or individuals) cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States. Please visit the CDC Coronavirus webpage frequently for updates.

Some additional factors to consider as you are evaluating whether to hold your event include:

- You should make this decision based on the best interest of the organization and its stakeholders without regard to the financial impact. The health and safety of your attendees are the priority.
- No one should discuss the options you are considering with attendees, sponsors, exhibitors, hotels and vendors until a communication plan has been developed. Should this confidential information be leaked, you will lose the important opportunity to control the messaging.

Steps you may want to consider:

1. Gather all contracts relating to the event and review key clauses: *force majeure* (unforeseeable circumstances that prevent someone from fulfilling a contract) may be triggered by a pandemic. Review the dispute resolution clauses, deposits, prevailing attorney fees, and method and timing of notice requirements to understand the details governing each agreement.
2. Calculate your potential liability for each agreement and prepare a summary. Your liability may be a range for each contract, so document what your minimum and maximum obligation might be.
3. Review your event cancellation coverage for the event, if applicable. Typically, a pandemic will trigger insurance coverage. Check with your insurance policy to review all cancellation riders.
4. Explore if your event or portions of it could be held virtually. Check with your parliamentarian and your state law(s) for guidance on holding events such as your annual meeting and elections using technology like webinars or teleconferences.
5. Determine a “go or no go” date. This will assist you in making a timely decision and developing a communications plan to roll-out once the decision is made.
6. Develop a communication plan on how you will sequence the messaging.
7. Have your attorney review draft notifications to attendees, sponsors, exhibitors, hotels and vendors prior to sending them.

Below are some additional references you may want to consult on a regular basis throughout your decision-making process:

- From the CDC
 - Guidance on Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events
 - Travel Restrictions
- From the Conference Direct Meeting Mentor:
 - Dilemma for a Viral Time: Cancel or Carry On?
 - Coronavirus and Event Insurance: Answers to Your Burning Questions
 - Where to Go for the Latest COVID-19 Info
 - Insiders' Guide to Event Coronavirus Precautions
- From the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA)
 - COVID-19 Coronavirus News & Resources

What type of consideration should be taken regarding the 2020 National PTA Convention & Expo?

National PTA continues to closely monitor all developments and restrictions created by the spread of COVID-19 and the impacts on our June 2020 Convention.

We have extended early-bird registration to April 20 and we will communicate any convention-related decisions to our membership in a timely manner.

Learn more about the event at [PTA.org/Convention](https://pta.org/Convention).



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