

Memo: How to Assess The Impact of Current Cases in Your County **March 14, 2020**

As new cases are diagnosed in counties without previous exposure, Superintendents who have not previously closed their schools are attempting to assess how the existence of those cases should impact closure decisions. We have heard from some that part of the decision-making process involves whether the case that was diagnosed in their county could potentially involve exposure to a member of the school community – be it a parent, student, volunteer, or staff member.

There are federal privacy laws that restrict disclosure of personal health information. However, there is an established epidemiology investigation protocol. This protocol involves health care workers identifying the possible exposure of each case – who they interacted with to potentially contract the disease, and who they interact with after contraction & incubation that may also now be at risk for infection. These investigations are confidential. But when confirmed by investigators, health officials are legally authorized under federal and state law to inform school system leadership as to whether the case involved exposure to any member of the school community.

Superintendents in areas where there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 should reach out to their local public health officials specifically to ask whether any member (or members) of the school community are at risk from the case. Confirmation one way or the other could help inform whether it remains prudent to stay open, or whether it is prudent from a public health perspective – to slow the spread of the disease – to close.

An important note regarding local health authorities: the [DSHS regional office](#) is your local health authority if your city or county is not on the list of [local public health organizations](#) listed on the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) website.