

As concern with COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) progresses, the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is providing the following guidance on addressing the mental health needs of students and communities during an infectious disease outbreak.

Access Quality Information

It is important to access accurate information from credible sources such as those listed below. This will help individuals maintain a healthy perspective and feel more in control.

The **Arkansas Department of Health (ADH)** has been designated as the lead agency in coordinating information and response to COVID-19 within the State of Arkansas. Information can be accessed at: <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus>.

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** provides regular updates on all aspects of the virus.

Under the *What You Should Know* section, readers can learn:

- How the disease spreads
- Prevention tactics
- Treatment protocols
- Answers to frequently asked questions

The *Situation Updates* section provides a summary of the virus, tracks cases specific to the United States and global locations affected by COVID-19, provides a risk assessment and explains how the CDC is taking action to prevent the further spread of the virus.

The website also provides information tailored to specific groups, **including schools**. Information can be accessed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** provides global expert perspectives on the COVID-19 virus, while also sharing individual best practices on topics like how to best protect yourself from the virus. Information can be accessed at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

Model Calmness

Children observe adult behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own feelings during difficult times. Maintain a practical and calm approach and follow official advice, particularly around observing good hygiene habits.

Provide Support

When talking with youth about the virus, relay factual information without causing alarm and in a way that is appropriate for a child's age and temperament.

The **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)** has provided a fact sheet for teachers, parents, and caregivers with ideas for helping children manage stress during an infectious

disease outbreak. It shares information on potential reactions among youth (broken down by age category) and best practices for adults to provide support. Information can be accessed at: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006> (you will have to download the publication from a link on the page).

The **CDC** also provides information on mental health and coping during an infectious disease outbreak. Information can be accessed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/coping.html>.

The DESE will continue to provide guidance and support on meeting our students' mental health needs and will continue to coordinate with other state agencies to provide ongoing updates as new information develops.

Mental Health related questions regarding the information provided in this memo may be directed to Charis Mian, Program Advisor of School-Based Mental Health, at charis.mian@arkansas.gov.