



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hawai'i Department of Health issues spring break guidelines for families to take action against COVID-19

HONOLULU — With thousands of students off from school for spring break beginning next week, the Hawai'i Department of Health is issuing guidelines families can follow to protect themselves against COVID-19 infection. Family members who are especially vulnerable include those who are 60 years and older, have a compromised immune system, or have existing health conditions such as diabetes, lung disease or a heart condition.

“We know that traditionally spring break is a time when families go on trips or spend more time at the malls, theaters, restaurants, and other places where the public gathers,” said Bruce Anderson, director of the Hawai'i Department of Health. “We are urging families to be circumspect and exercise extra precautions to minimize the risks of COVID-19 transmission.”

New website to go live next week

The Hawai'i Department of Health, in collaboration with other state agencies, is also developing guidelines for schools and for businesses and nonprofit organizations that are planning large-scale public events. These guidelines will be posted on a new, user-friendly website dedicated to providing easy access to COVID-19 facts and figures and timely updates.

With an average of more than 7,000 page views of the Department of Health's COVID-19 related webpages and more than 350,000 website visits since Jan. 20, the new separate website, scheduled to go live next week, will be easier to easy to navigate for the public.

Preventive measures

The Hawai'i Department of Health has issued the following spring break guidelines to manage the spread of COVID-19 in communities across the state:

- Consider avoiding crowded or congested areas, including large public gatherings such as concerts, sporting events, conventions, religious gathers and other community events (the Hawai'i Department of Health defines “large” gatherings as 100 people or more and allows for social distancing of people being six feet apart);
- Avoid non-essential travel to COVID-19 high-risk destinations;
- If you or a family member is sick, remain home except to receive medical help; and
- Avoid those who are sick and have flu-like symptoms such as coughing, fever, and shortness of breath.

Minimizing risks

“While we do not want to limit family activities or recommend cancelling their plans for spring break, we are urging families to take steps to minimize their risk of infection,” Anderson said. “Many of these guidelines are the same messages that we have been issuing since the COVID-19 outbreak, but have heightened relevance during the spring break because the potential for person-to-person transmission with an infected person exponentially increases and this could lead to additional cases of COVID-19 infection in our state.”

If families are planning to go to the malls, movies and other locations, they should implement safe hygiene practices.

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash;
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing;
- Avoid touching high-contact public surfaces such as phones, doors, tables, keys, bags and lights;
- Use alcohol-based hand-sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol; and
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects on a routine basis.

Social distancing

“Here in the islands, we value a culture of aloha that is expressed with hugging and kissing,” Anderson said, “but we would like families to consider practicing ‘social distancing,’ which recommends staying at least six feet—a distance of two arms-length—between people.”

These new practices may seem odd at first, but are effective in promoting health and wellness.

- Forgo hugging and kissing as greetings or farewells;
- Present a lei without a hug or kiss; and
- Handshakes are acceptable but remember to wash your hands,

Scheduled trips

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Hawai'i Department of Health also have specific guidelines for families who choose to travel outside the state for spring break:

- When returning home to Hawai'i, the Hawai'i Department of Health recommends family members monitor their health for a 14-day period from the time you left the area with widespread, ongoing community spread;
- If anyone in the family who went on the trip develops symptoms of a serious, sudden respiratory illness that includes a combination of fever, cough and shortness of breath, have mild symptoms (e.g., no fever but cough), are 60 years or older, or have underlying medical conditions, contact a healthcare provider before going to a medical facility; and
- Specific guidelines on travel are available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>

Flu shots

A flu shot is another valuable tool to prevent and effectively manage COVID-19. Although the flu shot does not protect against COVID-19, it will reduce the number of flu cases. This helps to reduce anxiety and frees up healthcare professionals to focus on people affected by COVID-19.

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