

Logistical Considerations for Paper-Based Packet Pickup to Mitigate Public Health Risks

Overview

In order to support students instructionally while they are at home, districts are offering a paper solution for families that do not have access to the Internet. This typically involves distributing paperwork packets to families for the students to complete while at home, along with frequent phone calls – either to the students directly or to their parents. This option also typically includes a review of completed paperwork.

When families have access to the Internet, effectively all activities can be done online, eliminating any public health risk associated with providing instructional support. However, in areas where COVID-19 has already become community-spread, paper-based options, where schools transfer paper-based packets back and forth from schools and home, can become a potential public health risk. This document is designed to provide some suggestions for mitigating the risk that COVID-19 is spread while still ensuring instructional support can be provided for all students.

Key Risks

There are three different directions of risk to consider in terms of potential virus spread with the transfer of paper packets: 1) from school personnel to the family; 2) from the family back to school personnel; and 3) from family to family. Each must be considered when designing packet transfer processes.

Packet Preparation

Much remains to be learned about COVID-19. There are no cases where the virus seems to have been transmitted through the mail¹, and preliminary evidence suggests the virus can only live on surfaces like cardboard for 24 hours and approximately 2-3 days on plastic.² This means that with some very basic sanitation protocols, any risk of homework packets themselves transmitting the virus can be minimized. We recommend the following steps be taken on paper packet preparation:

1. No school personnel who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should prepare packets. Each day that a staff member will be involved in packet preparation, they should, at a minimum, check their temperature before putting packets together. Staff members who are symptomatic should self-quarantine as recommended by the CDC.
2. No school personnel should be involved in packet preparation if they know they have had close, direct contact with an individual who has COVID-19 or is otherwise symptomatic. For example, if someone in a school staff member's home is showing signs of the virus,

even if they are not yet symptomatic, that school staff member should not be involved in putting packets together.

3. Any locations in the school used for packet preparation should be thoroughly cleaned, following appropriate cleaning protocols, before packet preparation begins. See: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/cleaning_disinfecting_schools.pdf
4. If you are putting packets in envelopes, choose envelopes that do not require moistening to seal.
5. Wait 24 hours before distributing packets to families if only paper-based materials are involved. Wait 72 hours if plastic materials are used.

Packet Distribution Options

Schools generally have two ways to get the packets to their students: 1) direct delivery; or 2) central pick-up.

All measures are similar to the measures employed at meal pick-up sites. You may consider whether you want these to be the same or separate sites.

Packet Distribution: Direct Delivery

If delivering packets directly to families, districts should first consider using the US Postal Service. The postal service is already transmitting materials every day, and there have been no cases to date of infection caused by this process.

Given this will be an added cost, districts should document these costs appropriately. There is the possibility the federal government will reimburse such costs if there are federal appropriations associated with COVID-19.

In some cases, districts choosing direct delivery may use district staff to accomplish the delivery. Precautions should be taken so that these staff members do not contract the virus during any delivery. These staff members should avoid direct contact with people during the delivery process—use mailboxes, leave packets at doorways, etc. They should regularly wash hands and use gloves where appropriate.

Packet Distribution: Pick-up

If the district is asking parents to come to the school to pick up their packets, consideration should be given to maximize social distancing. A few things to consider include the following:

- Establish a pick-up location that is outside the school building. For example, a table protected from the elements, with clearly marked bins by classroom can be set up.

- Encourage pick-up times that are spread out, so parents and students aren't required to interact with others during the pick-up process.
- Explicitly encourage parents to maintain distance from other parents while picking up packets. For example, they should remain 6 feet from anyone else while picking up packets. Consider placing markers on the ground to ensure six feet of separation.
- Consider using vehicle pick-up/drop-off lines to avoid having families enter the building. You may ask parents to display a sign with their child's name and teacher on the dash of their car.
- When communicating about the pick-up, explicitly tell parents, "DO NOT COME if you are symptomatic. Either send someone else or wait until you are no longer symptomatic."
- Take all necessary measures to clean the pick-up area after each pick-up cycle.

Packet Return

Periodically, teachers will need to review student work. This means that students and parents will need to return completed assignments for teachers to review. When this does not involve any Internet-based communication, care should be taken to mitigate risk of virus transmission.

Packet Return: Returned Mail

One option for districts to consider is self-addressed, stamped envelopes for return. In the packets going home to students, districts can insert appropriately sized self-addressed envelopes. Parents would then mail the homework assignments back to the school. Reminders: 1) choose envelopes that do not require being moistened to be sealed; 2) provide the appropriately sized envelope(s) to accommodate the work to be returned; and 3) pre-print envelopes with necessary no-postage-required business reply mail indicators (or put postage stamps on them if waiting for business reply mail permitting).

Schools can contact the USPS to set up the necessary business reply mail address processes:

<https://faq.usps.com/s/article/Business-Reply-Mail>

Packet Return: Drop Off

Another option districts may use is for the parents to drop the packets off at the school. If this option is chosen, districts should take care to maximize social distancing during the homework return process:

- Establish a drop-off location that is outside the school building or use vehicle pick-up/drop-off lines. A table, protected from the elements, with clearly marked bins by classroom can be used.

- Encourage drop-off times that are spread out, so parents and students aren't required to interact with others during the drop-off process.
- When communicating about the drop off, explicitly encourage parents to maintain distance from other parents while dropping off packets. For example, parents should remain 6 feet apart from anyone else while at the drop off.
- When communicating about the drop off, explicitly tell parents, "DO NOT COME if you are symptomatic. Either send someone else or wait until you are no longer symptomatic." In some of these cases, photos could be sent via MMS.
- Take all necessary measures to clean the drop-off area after each drop-off cycle.
- Wait 24 hours after a drop-off cycle before beginning to open the packets.
- If you have provided envelopes for parents/students to return their homework packets in, use envelopes that do not require them to be moistened to be sealed.

These measures would be similar to the measures employed at meal pick-up site.

Packet Return: Photos Sent via MMS

In some cases, the nature of the student work could be easily shared parents or students taking a photo of the work and sending the photo via MMS. For longer assignments this may prove untenable, and paper would need to be returned (either via mail or drop-off). But for some assignments, this could work well. Sending images via MMS typically does not require Internet access, so this may work for a number of families and a number of assignments.

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- 1- <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/statements/usps-statement-on-coronavirus.htm>
- 2 - <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/03/200320192755.htm>