



## SCHOOL RISK MANAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

### PREPARING SCHOOLS FOR FUTURE HEALTH CRISES

The COVID-19 pandemic was a wake-up call for schools in 2020. Suddenly, employees were looking to administration teams for guidance in areas not typically considered their expertise. The pandemic was a turning point for many workplaces—now, public schools are expected to understand public health challenges swiftly and manage them efficiently.

This article outlines four ways administration teams can prepare for future public health crises. Schools should use this information to help cope with the current COVID-19 pandemic fallout and beyond.

#### 1. ASSESSING THE RISK

One of the first steps during a public health crisis is to assess the risk of the organization. To do this, employers must educate themselves about the crisis in general. This means staying updated on federal and local health guidance to help inform organizational strategies.

While workplace risk assessments will vary during a health crisis, all employers will need to consider the impact on staff. Are they at a heightened risk by being in the workplace during this crisis? What safety protocols will keep staff safe? An assessment should answer these questions and help schools prepare to make informed choices in response to the crisis.

#### 2. ADAPTING QUICKLY

Based on the risk assessment, employers must be prepared to adapt quickly to the health crisis. For instance, if staff are at high risk due to their working conditions, perhaps requiring them to work remotely would be the best solution. Early last year, schools adapted quickly to the new virtual environment.

Administrators must ensure safeguards are in place so that staff doesn't need to choose between their jobs and their health.

#### 3. COMMUNICATING THOROUGHLY

At every stage, administrators should keep staff in the loop. This means sharing the outcome of the risk assessment and clearly communicating any new workplace protocols. Staff should never have to wonder how their workplace is handling a crisis.

#### 4. WELCOMING CHANGE

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools scrambled to change to a virtual platform. The DHS and the Governor's orders forced schools to have employees work remotely, and many schools adapted to a hybrid or in-person model last May. Schools need to be prepared to make these decisions swiftly and embrace the changing landscape. This might mean having some staff work remotely while others remain in the workplace. School officials and boards should think about such contingencies and be prepared to follow through if a public health crisis happens again in the future.

#### SUMMARY

Responding to a health crisis will be much easier when a school plans for such an event ahead of time. Reach out for more school safety guidance to help in this effort.

#### OTHER RESOURCES

- [Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before COVID-19](#)
- [Preparing for infectious disease epidemics: Brief Tips for School Mental Health Professionals](#)
- [WASB - COVID-19 Resources & Info](#)



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