Parent information concerning coronavirus

Dear Parents/Carers,

The Thuringian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (TMBJS) would like to provide everyone with the necessary information on how Thuringian schools will be responding to the coronavirus (COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2) in the coming days and weeks.

The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), which can cause the disease COVID-19, is currently posing new challenges for the Thuringian school system. Nationwide and in the neighbouring federal states the situation is evolving and changing rapidly. The Thuringian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is in close contact with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Social Welfare, Health, Women and Family (TMASGFF) which is responsible for the fight against the spread of the coronavirus. The local health authorities are responsible for infection prevention and control and can independently make binding decisions.

The scientific evaluations, risk assessments and the recommendations of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) as well as the assessments of experts in Thuringia form the basis for all our measures in Thuringian schools.

On the website of the Thuringian Ministry of Education (https://bildung.thueringen.de/ministerium/coronavirus) you can find general information as well as further links and tips. The website is constantly being updated.

Currently the Robert Koch Institute does not assume there is widespread circulation of the coronavirus in the population in Germany. Therefore, precautionary testing of all persons with respiratory infections is not deemed necessary. **Only suspected cases** are being tested for the coronavirus. Testing for coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 is done by collecting swabs in the nose or the throat or of sputum from the lung. The test methods are very sensitive.
and can detect small quantities of the virus. Generally, tests only make sense for patients with flu like symptoms such as a cough, cold, a fever or difficulty in breathing as the virus is only in the secretions of the respiratory system of this group of patients. People who are (still) healthy and do not have any symptoms can be tested negative despite being infected with the coronavirus. If people are tested too early, it is possible that the virus is not to be found in the secretions of the respiratory system. Therefore, a negative test result of individuals without acute symptoms does not rule out an infection with SARS-CoV-2.

Measures at schools

As of now the following new measures apply to all Thuringian schools:

It is to be differentiated between people with a verified COVID-19 infection (point. I), people with direct contact to a person infected with COVID-19 (point. II), people returning from abroad (point. III), people with general common cold symptoms (point. IV) and other people (point. V).

A. Who should attend school, who must stay at home?

I. People with a COVID-19 infection

People with a verified COVID-19 infection are not allowed to enter any school building. They are to be isolated immediately and treated at a hospital. The local health authorities are responsible for patients with a COVID-19 infection.

If students, teachers or other pedagogical and technical staff of a school become infected with COVID-19, they should immediately inform the local health authorities (if they have not already done so) as well as the head teacher of their school.

II. People with direct contact to a person infected with COVID-19

Irrespective of any prior travel to a high risk area, people who have had direct contact (at least 15 minutes of face-to-face contact in close proximity) to a person whose infection with coronavirus has been established by an approved laboratory, are not allowed to enter the school building.

They must report to the local health authorities immediately, irrespective of their symptoms. The relevant health authorities will observe their state of health for the maximum incubation period (14 days), depending on their individual risk of infection. A mandatory domestic quarantine may also apply.
The mandatory domestic quarantine serves the protection against infection and is to be strictly adhered to. Being quarantined is not a violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law.

III. People returning from abroad

If students are returning from abroad, it has to be differentiated between travel destinations that the Robert Koch Institute classifies as high risk areas (point 1) and other destinations (point 2). An up-to-date overview of high risk destinations is available on the website of the Robert Koch Institute: https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Risikogebiete.html.

1. Destinations classified as high risk areas

People, who have spent time at a destination the Robert Koch Institute classifies as an international high risk area, are not allowed to enter the school building for 14 days after returning. Not attending school for this time is not a violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law.

If people experience acute respiratory symptoms within this time span, they should pay attention to proper sneeze and cough hygiene as well as washing their hands regularly and thoroughly. They should call a doctor and tell them about the trip abroad. Any further course of action will be coordinated by the local health authorities where necessary.

If no symptoms occur, people can return to school after these 14 days.

2. Other foreign destinations

Students returning from any other countries continue to attend school.

I. People with cold-like symptoms

Individuals experiencing common cold-like symptoms such as a cough or runny nose must not enter the school building as long as they keep experiencing these symptoms. This is not a violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law.

II. Other people

For all other students compulsory school attendance applies.
B. Closing of schools

Head teachers are authorized to exclude students from classes on an individual basis, if they pose a health risk.

If it is deemed necessary, the local health authority can close a school completely or partly. In case of emergency a head teacher can have the school closed. In this case students of this school do not violate the Compulsory School Attendance Law.

If such precautions are taken, the parents will be informed immediately through all available channels.

C. School trips, excursions and other school events

For school trips, excursions and other school events the following rules apply as of now:

I. School trips, excursions and student exchanges abroad that have already started

Currently ongoing school trips abroad are to be interrupted. Students must return home as soon as possible. This is to make sure that students and staff can safely return to Germany and are not quarantined abroad. Currently there is no way of foreseeing the measures other countries may take to fight coronavirus, e.g. quarantine, closing of borders.

School trips, excursions or student exchanges abroad that have been approved of already, must not take place this term. All trips, excursions and exchanges are to be cancelled by the head teacher. This is to be done to avoid a mandatory quarantine (2 weeks) in the foreign country and to make sure that students and teachers can return to Germany without any problems.

School trips, excursions or student exchanges abroad that have not been approved yet for this term, may not be approved.

Decisions on planned school trips, excursions or student exchanges abroad for the next school year will be made in due course.

II. School events taking place in Germany

The head teacher will decide which events will take place and which will be cancelled on an individual basis (e.g. school trips, excursions, theatre performances, competitions).
Reduction of personal contact is imperative. This means that events for a limited number of students can take place, e.g. an excursion into the woods or a school trip by bus to the Baltic Sea. All events with significant additional contact with other people should be cancelled. This applies to school trips by train, theatre performances, competitions with external participants, day trips to historic sites. School events that bring students into contact with people with underlying health conditions and therefore at risk (e.g. visits to nursing homes) are to be cancelled.

If in doubt, school events taking place in Germany are to be cancelled.

III. Reimbursement of school trips, excursions or student exchanges abroad

Should school trips or other school events be cancelled for the above-mentioned reason, coverage by travel cancellation insurance etc. is to be claimed first.

Concerning costs that are not covered and have to be paid by parents, the Thuringian government is currently in the process of determining whether parents can be reimbursed by the free state of Thuringia. You will be informed as soon as a decision has been made.

D. Examinations

Should the time available for the preparation of the central school leaving examinations be shortened considerably, schools will be supplied with additional learning materials. Possible alternative examination papers are currently being prepared. There will also be adequate opportunity given to take tests or sit for tests at a later date.

I would like to assure you that the Thuringian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is making all decisions concerning the coronavirus crisis responsibly and in close cooperation with the health authorities. It is our goal to keep schools open for as long as possible, to minimize the effect of school closures on public life. Nevertheless, the situation is evolving rapidly so that new measures may become necessary.

From Tuesday, March 17th, 2020 all public schools and daycare facilities for children as well as privately owned ones will be closed till the end of the Easter holidays on April 17th, 2020.
Emergency daycare options in schools and kindergartens are currently being organised. They will be available to a limited number of people to minimize the contact between people. Schools will provide students with study tasks.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Julia Heesen