

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance for Schools (Preschool-K-12 and Adult Education)

Current public health data suggests continued community spread of COVID-19 within the District of Columbia and the surrounding region. Schools have the potential to increase community spread of COVID-19 through the congregating and mixing students, staff, and teachers. DC Health encourages maintaining a virtual learning posture until local public health data shows decreased community spread of COVID-19. For additional information, including current District COVID-19 related public health data, visit coronavirus.dc.gov.

Schools pursuing in-person activities should be implement the following measures in order to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among students and staff.

Support Safety of Employees and Students

Daily Health Screening

- Schools must perform a daily health screen for all students and staff entering the building. An individual with any of the following symptoms must not enter the school, and instead they must isolate immediately and call their healthcare provider:
 - Fever (subjective or 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, or otherwise feeling unwell.
 - Symptoms can be evaluated before arrival (via phone or app), or upon arrival and can be based on report from caregivers.
 - For Screening Tool Guidance, visit coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
- If a student or staff member develops any of the symptoms above during the school day, the school must have a process in place that allows them to isolate until it is safe to go home and seek healthcare provider guidance.

Encourage Healthy Practices

- Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissue) to support healthy hygiene practices.
- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Perform frequent hand hygiene (with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
 - Key times to perform hand hygiene include
 - Before eating food,
 - After using the toilet,
 - Before and after putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings or touching your face,
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

High-Risk Individuals

Students and staff at increased risk for experiencing severe illness due to COVID-19 are recommended to consult with their medical provider **before** attending in-person activities.

- People with the following conditions **are at increased risk** of severe illness from COVID-19:
 - Cancer
 - Chronic kidney disease

- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Immunocompromised state from solid organ transplant
- Obesity (Body Mass Index of 30 or higher)
- Serious heart conditions
- Sickle cell disease
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus
- For a complete list of conditions which might be at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, please see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).
- Any staff member or student who has a medical condition not listed, but who is concerned about their safety, are recommended to consult with their medical provider before attending in-person activities.

Preventing a Vaccine-Preventable Disease Outbreak

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and DC Health data, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant reduction in childhood vaccine administrations across the country including the District of Columbia and Maryland.

In order to prevent a vaccine preventable disease outbreak in a school setting, it is imperative for all students who attend in-person activities be **fully vaccinated** according to CDC and DC Health standards.

- Ensure a policy is in place for reviewing of immunization status of children, provision of reminders to parents, timelines for compliance, and exclusion of children who do not meet requirements.
- A review of immunizations can be found [here](#).
- CDC has other resources regarding [Vaccine-Preventable Diseases](#).

Additionally, all students and staff should receive their seasonal Influenza vaccine to help prevent an influenza outbreak during the current COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, visit [flu.gov](https://www.flu.gov).

Implement Controls to Limit Contact

Non-Medical Face Coverings (Face Masks)

- All students and staff must wear non-medical face coverings or face masks at all times while at school.

For more information about non-medical face coverings or face masks, please refer to the guidance “Guidance about Masks and Other Face Coverings for the General Public” on [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://www.coronavirus.dc.gov).

Social Distancing

Schools must ensure appropriate physical distancing by having:

- No more than 12 total individuals clustered in one group, and no more than one group per room,
 - Six feet of distance between each individual,
 - One additional staff (13 total individuals) can be briefly added to the class if necessary to support individual student needs,
- Grouping the same students and staff together each day and throughout the day
 - Limiting non-essential visitors,
- No mixing between groups to include entry and exit of the building, at meal time, in the rest room, on the playground, in the hallway, and other shared spaces,

- Cancel activities and events such as field trips, student assemblies, athletic events or practices, special performances, school-wide parent meetings,
- Cancel or modify classes where students are likely to be in very close contact,
 - Of note, activities in which voices are projected, such as choir or theater, present greater risk of spread of respiratory droplets, and should be cancelled even if group size and physical distance can be maintained.

Schools should:

- Integrate pauses in the schedule (e.g., alternating day or week schedules) to interrupt possible chains of transmission
- Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) to reduce transmission caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing),
- Allow students to eat lunch and breakfast in their classrooms rather than mixing in the cafeteria. If not possible, then stagger lunch by class and/or segregate outdoor eating area by class.
- Stagger arrival and/or dismissal times,
- Add physical barriers and add reminders about physical distance to reduce congestion in the health office.
- Educate staff, students, and their families on COVID-19 and social distancing.

Establish a Plan for COVID-19 Exposure

- If any student or staff member has been in close contact with a person who is positive for COVID-19, then the student or staff member must not enter the school until they have completed their quarantine period without becoming symptomatic or diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Any child or staff member who is awaiting a COVID-19 test result must not enter the school until their result comes back negative.
- In the event a school identifies a student or staff member who has tested positive for COVID-19, it is important for the school to establish a plan for COVID-19 exposures.
- Identify a point of contact at the school that an employee can notify if they test positive for COVID-19 in order to disclose this information.
- Implement leave policies that are flexible and non-punitive and allow sick employees to stay home.
 - Leave policies are recommended to account for the following:
 - Employees who report COVID-19 symptoms,
 - Employees who were tested for COVID-19 and test results are pending,
 - Employees who tested positive for COVID-19,
 - Employees who are a close contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19,
 - Employees who need to stay home with their children if there are school or childcare closures, or to care for sick family members.
 - Keep abreast of current law, which has amended both the DC Family and Medical Leave Act and the DC Sick and Safe Leave Law and created whole new categories of leave, like Declared Emergency Leave.
 - Learn about and inform your employees about COVID-related leave provided through new federal law, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and all applicable District law relating to sick leave.
- Staff or students diagnosed with COVID-19 must not enter the school until they have been

- cleared from isolation.
- In consultation with DC Health, schools should have a notification process in place to share the following with staff and parents:
 - Education about COVID-19, including the signs and symptoms of COVID-19
 - Referral to the Guidance for Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have COVID-19, available at coronavirus.dc.gov.
 - Information on options for COVID-19 testing in the District of Columbia, available at coronavirus.dc.gov/testing.
 - Schools must notify DC Health when:
 - A staff member notifies the school they **tested positive for COVID-19** (not before results come back)

OR

 - If a student or parent of a student notifies the school a student **tested positive for COVID-19** (not before results come back).
 - Notify DC Health by submitting an online form on our website: dchealth.dc.gov/page/covid-19-reporting-requirements under the section “Non-Healthcare Facility Establishment Reporting.”
 - Select “Non-healthcare facility establishment seeking guidance about an employee, patron, or visitor that reported testing positive for COVID-19 (epidemiology consult/guidance).”
 - An investigator from DC Health will follow-up within 24 hours to all appropriately submitted notifications.
 - DC Health will instruct schools on dismissals and other safety precautions in the event a known positive COVID-19 individual came in close contact with others at school.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

All schools must regularly clean, disinfect and sanitize surfaces, and materials per [District guidance on cleaning and disinfecting](#).

- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops). Clean with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
- For all cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting products, follow the manufacturer’s instructions for concentration, application method, contact time, and drying time prior to use by a child. See [CDC’s guidance for safe and correct application of disinfectants](#).

Building Considerations

Schools that are reopening after a prolonged facility shutdown must ensure all ventilation and water systems and features (e.g. sink faucets, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use as follows:

- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Increase in air circulation should be continued after reopening where safe and possible. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms) to children using the facility.
- Flush water systems to clear out stagnant water and replace it with fresh water. This will remove any metals (e.g. lead) that may have leached into the water and minimize the risk of [Legionnaires’ disease](#) and other diseases associated with water.

- Further details on steps for this process can be found on the CDC website at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html.

Special Considerations for Residential Schools

For schools with a residential component (i.e. boarding schools), they must ensure all of the above safety measures are followed in the residential setting.

Additionally, the following safety measures must be followed:

- No more than two students per residential room with a strong preference of one student per residential room,
- 14-day quarantine for students arriving from areas of high community spread of COVID-19 per Mayor's Order 2020-081: Requirement to Self-Quarantine After Non-Essential Travel During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency
- Designation of private rooms with dedicated bathrooms for isolation of any students that may test positive for COVID-19;
- Designation of private rooms with dedicated bathrooms for quarantining of any close contacts of confirmed cases of COVID-19 (this area should be separate from the isolation area);
- Testing access for students showing symptoms of COVID-19 or with known exposure to individuals with COVID-19,
- Appropriate and easy access to medical services for COVID-19 related and non-COVID-19 related conditions, and
- Plan and capability to restrict or eliminate in person activities rapidly in the case of significant community transmission or identified outbreak of COVID-19, including indications and procedures for closure of residential halls and dormitories.

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit coronavirus.dc.gov regularly for the most current information.