

What's Different for Fall: Best Practices for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools

7/28/2021

This summary highlights information that is new or will be different from summer school guidance with the release of updated CDC guidance for schools that is recommended for the fall.

Reference the *Best Practice Recommendations for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools* document on [Schools and Child Care COVID-19 - Best Practice Recommendations](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/plan.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/plan.html>) for additional details, resources and links to help with implementation of the recommendations.

This document also references existing, unchanged requirements from the federal government and existing Minnesota Rule.

Federal government and Minnesota Rule requirements

- **Face coverings:** All people are required by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order to wear face coverings on all indoor public transportation conveyances (airports, public buses, etc.), including school buses.
 - [CDC: Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html)
- **Handling a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19:** Minnesota Rule 4605.7070 requires any person in charge of any institution, school, child care facility, or camp to report cases of COVID-19 to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).
 - [Reportable Disease Rule](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/reportable/rule/index.html) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/reportable/rule/index.html)

CDC best practice prevention strategies to reduce transmission of COVID-19

Consistent and correct mask use

2021 summer guidance:

- It was strongly recommended that all people present in school buildings and district offices wear a face covering.

Fall guidance:

- **Indoors:** Recommended for everyone, vaccinated or not, to wear a mask.
- **Outdoors:** In general, do not need to wear a mask outdoors. However, in areas of high transmission, it's recommend that people who aren't fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities with sustained close contact with others who are not fully vaccinated.
- **Transportation:** CDC's order for public conveyances still applies to school buses, regardless of mask policy at school.

Physical distancing and cohorting

2021 summer guidance:

- Evaluate classroom capacity with the goal of creating as much space between students as possible. The CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend placing student desks at least 3 feet apart at a minimum, and up to 6 feet apart in areas of high community transmission in settings where cohorting is not possible.

Fall guidance:

- Implement distancing to the extent possible within structures, but do not exclude students to keep a minimum distance requirement.
- When physical distance of at least 3 feet can't be maintained between students in classrooms, it is especially important to layer other prevention strategies.
- A distance of at least 6 feet is recommended between students and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated.
- Cohorting can be used to limit the number of students, teachers, and staff who come in contact with each other, especially when it is challenging to maintain physical distancing, such as among young children, and particularly in areas of moderate-to-high transmission levels. The use of cohorting can limit the spread of COVID-19 between cohorts but should not replace other prevention measures within each group.

Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine

2021 summer guidance:

- **Close contact/close contact exposure:** A close contact is ANY person who lives with someone who tests positive for COVID-19 or who has spent a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period within 6 feet of anyone who has COVID-19. The definition of a close contact applies regardless of whether either person was wearing a mask.

Fall guidance:

Close contact definition includes an exception.

- Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes).
- An infected person can spread COVID-19 starting from two days before they have any symptoms (or, for asymptomatic patients, two days before the positive specimen collection date), until they meet criteria for discontinuing home isolation.
- **Exception:** In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where:
 - Both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks; and
 - Other K–12 school prevention strategies (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the K–12 school setting.
 - **This exception does not apply** to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.

Vaccination

No differences.

Cleaning and disinfection, and hygiene practices

No differences.

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

No differences.

Screening testing

No differences.

Staying home when sick and getting tested

No differences.



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