



Updated COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools

Date: March 24, 2021

Public Health Message Type: Alert Advisory Update Information

Intended Audience: All public health partners Healthcare providers Infection preventionists
 Local health departments Schools ACOs
 Animal health professionals Other:

Key Points:

- On March 19th, CDC released [Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 schools](#) which summarizes evidence on COVID-19 among children and adolescents and what is known about preventing transmission in schools.
- On March 19th, CDC released [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#) which outlines revised guidelines for physical distancing recommendations to reflect at least 3 feet between students **in classrooms** and provided clearer guidance when a greater distance (6 feet) is recommended.
- NJDOH has updated [COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools](#) to reflect distancing recommendations as outlined by CDC.
- The distancing recommendations in this current guidance aim to balance risk of disease transmission with the benefits of offering in-person instruction to as many children as possible.
- Full in-person instruction means to open to as many students as possible with mitigation strategies in place, including minimum social distancing, universal masking, cleaning, hand hygiene and other strategies in place as recommended. Hybrid learning may be necessary to accommodate distancing, with an emphasis on elementary and priority learners of all ages.

Updates:

- COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix updates:
 - Elementary Schools: Recommend full in person instruction with a minimum of 3 feet of physical distancing between students maintained in classrooms with strict adherence to mask-wearing in Low, Moderate and High-Risk levels.
 - Middle/High schools Recommend full in person instruction with a minimum of 3 feet of physical distancing between students maintained in classrooms with strict adherence to mask-wearing in Low and Moderate Risk Levels.
 - Middle/High Schools: While in High-Risk Level, consider in person instruction if able to maximize physical distancing of 6 feet or more. Recommend 6 feet of physical

distancing between students to the maximum extent practicable with strict adherence to mask-wearing.

- Mask wearing should be enforced at all times.
- Outside of classrooms, 6 feet of physical distancing should be maintained to the maximal extent possible for all grade levels.
- 6 feet of physical distancing is particularly important in the following scenarios:
 - For middle and high schoolers when regional risk is high (orange)
 - Between staff members in the school building and between staff members and students.
 - In common areas, such as school lobbies and auditoriums
 - When masks can't be worn, such as when eating
 - During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, sports, or exercise (even if masks are worn)
 - In community settings outside of the classroom.
- CDC and NJDOH continues to recommend six feet of physical distancing when masks cannot be worn.
- Recommendations to increase airflow:
 - Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
 - Open windows and doors if safe to do so.
 - Use of fans to increase effectiveness of open windows.
 - Consider having activities, classes or lunches outdoors.
 - Open windows on buses if safe to do so.
- Teachers and staff who have been fully vaccinated should follow the [NJDOH Guidelines for Vaccinated Individuals](#).
- CDC and NJDOH continues to use proximity of six feet or less for more than 15 minutes to determine the need for quarantining persons in contact with a COVID-19 case.
- Diagnostic Testing: At all levels of community transmission, NJDOH recommends that schools work with their local health departments to identify rapid viral testing options in their community for the testing of symptomatic individuals and asymptomatic individuals who were exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Having access to [rapid COVID-19 testing for ill students and staff](#) can reduce unnecessary exclusion of ill persons and their contacts and minimize unnecessary disruptions of the educational process.
- Screening Testing: Some schools may also elect to use [screening testing](#) as a strategy to identify cases and prevent secondary transmission.
- Testing strategies in K-12 schools should be developed in consultation with local health departments.

Contact Information:

- The Communicable Disease Service at (609) 826-5964 during business hours.

References and Resources:

- CDC's [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#)
- CDC's [Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 schools](#)

- NJDOH [COVID-19: Information for Schools](#)
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On March 19th, CDC released [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#) which outlines revised guidelines for physical distancing recommendations to reflect at least 3 feet between students **in classrooms** and provided clearer guidance when a greater distance (6 feet) is recommended.

Evidence suggests that many K-12 schools that have strictly implemented prevention strategies have been able to safely open for in-person instruction and remain open. CDC's K-12 operational strategy presents a pathway for schools to provide in-person instruction safely through consistent use of prevention strategies, including universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing.

NJDOH has updated the [COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools](#) to reflect distancing recommendations as outlined by CDC. This document supersedes the January 19th guidance and will be posted to the [COVID-19: Information for Schools](#) page.