

DCHD Statement on COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in Schools Updated July 28, 2021

The DuPage County Health Department (DCHD) strongly recommends school districts begin the 2021-2022 school year with layered COVID-19 prevention strategies in place that are outlined in the updated [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidance for K-12 schools](#), which were fully adopted by the Illinois Department of Public Health. These prevention strategies include:

- Promoting vaccination,
- Consistent and correct mask use,
- Physical distancing,
- Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks,
- Enhanced ventilation,
- Support for handwashing and respiratory etiquette,
- Staying home when sick and getting tested,
- Contact tracing, in combination with isolation, quarantine, and post-exposure viral testing, and
- Proper cleaning and disinfection.

While acknowledging that school leaders and local school districts hold the ultimate authority and discretion to develop plans to return to school, DCHD promotes strategies to **reduce the risk and likelihood of COVID-19 spread in school settings** in order to maximize the benefits in-person learning provides.

Based on the recent preliminary evidence announced by CDC, DCHD now strongly recommends school districts begin the school year requiring universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors in K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. CDC continues to recommend masking and physical distancing in schools as key prevention strategies, particularly as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations rise. **Prevention strategies in schools will continue to evolve as COVID-19 community transmission declines to lower levels for sustained periods and when individuals under the age of 12 years are eligible to be vaccinated.**

At this time, individuals under the age of 12 years are not eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccine and therefore, this group of our students will not be fully vaccinated when they return to in-person school this fall. **The use of masks in schools by all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools (regardless of vaccination status) will reduce school-based and community transmission of COVID-19, reduce the need for quarantine of students who are close contacts in school, and therefore keep more students learning in-person.**

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CDC recently updated the definition of close contacts in school settings to exclude situations when students are wearing masks in the classroom at the time of their exposure within 3 to 6 feet to a COVID-19 case. As a result, **requirements for teachers, staff, students, and visitors to wear masks in school will decrease the number of persons who must stay home and quarantine as a result of their close contact to a COVID-19 case. This will result in a safer environment for students and staff – a goal we all share.**

As we all work together to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our students, staff, and community, we must continue to protect ourselves and one another from the serious effects of COVID-19 disease. Our collective goal is to bring an end to this pandemic!

References

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Science Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs – Updated](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Science Brief: COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination](#)

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