

**Guidance for K-12 School Operations for In-Person Learning:
Layered Prevention Strategies and COVID-19 Community Levels
March 4, 2022**

The purpose of this document is to provide information on prevention strategies that help protect students, teachers, and staff and slow the spread of COVID-19 in K-12 schools based on [CDC guidelines for K-12 schools](#) and [COVID-19 community level estimates](#) developed by CDC. This guidance is intended to help school administrators and local health officials select appropriate, layered prevention strategies in their communities. SARS-CoV-2 transmission in K-12 schools is largely influenced by disease incidence in the community. Layered prevention strategies should be implemented in response to the following factors:

- [Level of COVID-19 in the county.](#)
- Occurrence of outbreaks in the school or community.
- [COVID-19 vaccination coverage in the community](#) and among students, teachers, and staff.
- Frequency and use of a SARS-CoV-2 testing screening program for students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated.
- Social, behavioral, or medical vulnerability factors that may affect the risk of transmission and feasibility of different prevention strategies in the school or individual classrooms.

Layered prevention strategies and COVID-19 community levels

COVID-19 community levels can be low, medium, or high and are determined by the number of hospital beds being used for COVID-19 patients, hospital admissions for COVID-19, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in a community. When [COVID-19 community levels](#) are classified as high (red), full implementation of most or all layers of protection is recommended. Schools should clearly communicate their strategies and anticipated changes in plans.

COVID-19 Community Level and K-12 Schools

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Baseline prevention strategies	Localized and targeted mitigation	Most layered prevention strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay up to date with vaccinations • Stay home when sick • 5-day isolation + 5-day masking for individuals with COVID-19 • Targeted mask use following at-school exposures and during outbreaks • Promote on-site testing programs for sick or exposed persons • Test to Stay modified quarantine following community exposures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay up to date with vaccinations • Stay home when sick • 5-day isolation + 5-day masking for individuals with COVID-19 • Targeted mask use following at-school exposures and during outbreaks • Consider universal masking for all students and staff • Promote on-site testing programs for sick or exposed persons • Test to Stay modified quarantine following community exposures • Cohort classrooms and limit mixing between students, where possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay up to date with vaccinations • Stay home when sick • 5-day isolation + 5-day masking for individuals with COVID-19 • Universal masking for all students and staff indoors and on buses • Promote on-site testing programs for sick or exposed persons • Test to Stay modified quarantine following community exposures • Cohort classrooms, limit mixing between students, where possible • Limit large gatherings and activities • Encourage physical distancing >3ft

Vaccination	
<u>All levels</u>	<p>Promote and offer vaccination to help increase the proportion of students (5 years of age or older), teachers, staff, and family members who are vaccinated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging students, teachers, staff, and family members to stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations. • Providing on-site vaccination or hosting vaccination clinics at schools. • Working with local partners to offer vaccination to eligible students and family members during pre-sport/extracurricular activity summer physicals. • Providing information to families about vaccine safety and availability in the community.
Masks	
<u>Low or Medium</u>	<p>Targeted use of well-fitting masks should be considered during the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For early return from isolation (prior to 10 days) for individuals who test positive for COVID-19. • During clusters or outbreaks of COVID-19 in a classroom, grade, or school. • For 10 days following known exposures to COVID-19. • For individuals participating in a Test to Stay modified quarantine. <p>Consider universal masking for students and staff during COVID-19 clusters or outbreaks.</p>
<u>High</u>	<p>All persons 2 years of age and older should wear well-fitting masks or face coverings while indoors in all classroom and non-classroom settings, including buses operated by public and private school systems, unless otherwise exempted (e.g., cannot wear a mask due to disability), regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status.</p>
Physical distancing	
<u>Low or Medium</u>	<p>Physical distancing is not routinely recommended but should be considered after COVID-19 exposures, during outbreaks, or for high-risk persons.</p>
<u>High</u>	<p>Physical distancing of at least 3 feet is recommended between K-12 students in classrooms. To the greatest extent practicable, schools should reduce the number of students in each classroom, turn desks to face the same direction, utilize assigned seating, and remove nonessential furniture. Maximize physical distancing for unvaccinated persons who are eating meals indoors. Students should not be excluded from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement.</p> <p>Physical distancing of at least 6 feet is recommended between students and teachers/staff.</p> <p>Utilize cohorts or pods (a stable group with fixed membership that stays together through activities) as an additional strategy that facilitates more efficient contact tracing and minimizes opportunities for transmission, especially when it is challenging to maintain physical distancing (e.g., young children) or when other layered prevention strategies are discontinued.</p> <p>Limit nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities with people who are not up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations.</p>

Isolation	
<u>All levels</u>	<p>Ensure sick students, teachers, or staff stay home if they have fever and/or symptoms of COVID-19, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fever ($\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$) or feeling feverish (e.g., chills, sweating) ○ New cough ○ Difficulty breathing ○ Sore throat ○ Muscle aches or body aches ○ Vomiting or diarrhea ○ New loss of taste or smell <p>Instruct parents/guardian, teachers, and staff to report positive COVID-19 test results to the school or school district.</p> <p>Ensure persons who test positive for COVID-19 self-isolate away from school for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 5 full days from the day that their symptoms started if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. The first day of symptoms is considered day 0. The individual may return to school after 5 days when their symptoms are fully resolved or after 10 days even if they have lingering symptoms. The individual must continue to wear a well-fitting mask for 10 full days when around others indoors. If the individual is unable to wear a mask properly and consistently in indoor school settings, they should self-isolate from school for 10 full days. • 5 full days from the date of testing if they have never developed symptoms. The day of testing is considered day 0. The individual must continue to wear a well-fitting mask for 10 full days when around others indoors. If the individual is unable to wear a mask properly and consistently in indoor school settings, they should self-isolate from school for 10 full days. If the individual develops symptoms of COVID-19, they should follow the above isolation guidance for someone with symptoms. <p>Direct sick persons to isolate at home away from school. Sick students, teachers, or staff who are not tested for COVID-19 may return when their symptoms resolve. Consider implementing a program to offer on-site rapid COVID-19 testing for sick students, teachers, or staff.</p>

Exposures and Quarantine	
<u>All levels</u>	<p>When COVID-19 exposures occur in school settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact tracing following school exposures to COVID-19 is not expected. Where feasible, schools should notify families and staff when a known exposure to COVID-19 occurs in the classroom or in school settings. • Everyone who is known to have had close contact to a person with COVID-19 should wear a well-fitting mask when around others for 10 days and is recommended to be tested 5 days or more after the exposure. • Quarantine is not routinely recommended following exposures to COVID-19 that occur in school settings. Targeted use of quarantine may be recommended during outbreaks of COVID-19 in the classroom or school. <p>When COVID-19 exposures occur outside of school settings (i.e., households):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarantine is not recommended for the following individuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students 5-17 years of age who <u>have completed their 2-dose COVID-19 vaccine series</u>. ○ Persons 18 years of age and older who are <u>up to date</u> with their recommended COVID-19 vaccinations. ○ Persons who <u>have documented COVID-19 illness</u> in the 3 months prior to their exposure (with a positive COVID-19 PCR or antigen test). Antibody testing should not be used for determining need to quarantine. • <u>“Test to Stay” modified quarantine</u> is recommended for individuals who do not meet the above exemption criteria and who are asymptomatic. Individuals may continue to attend in-person school activities if they have received at least one negative COVID-19 test during the 5-day quarantine period and can wear a well-fitting mask in indoor school settings when around others. • Quarantine, or Test to Stay modified quarantine, may be discontinued after day 5 if the individual is symptom free. The last day of exposure to the case is considered day 0. If the individual is continually exposed to COVID-19 (i.e., a household member that they are unable to isolate away from) then the last day of exposure is the last day that the case is considered infectious (day 5-10, determined by the individual’s last day of symptoms). • Everyone who is known to have had close contact to a person with COVID-19 should wear a well-fitting mask when around others for 10 days and is recommended to be tested 5 days or more after the exposure.

Additional guidance	
<u>All levels</u>	<p>Consider implementing no-cost COVID-19 testing for unvaccinated students, teachers, and/or staff to help promptly identify and isolate cases and to guide the use of layered prevention strategies in the school. Screening testing can be considered for individuals participating in sports, extracurricular activities, or other activities with elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., singing, shouting, playing wind instruments) when COVID-19 community levels are high or when known exposures to COVID-19 have occurred in the school setting. Testing should be conducted with informed consent from the appropriate person or parent/guardian.</p> <p>Improve facility ventilation to the greatest extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air and increase delivery of clean air. Utilize outdoor spaces, where possible.</p> <p>Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for 20 seconds or use of hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Ensure adequate supplies and opportunities for hand hygiene.</p> <p>Improve facility cleaning to the greatest extent possible. In general, cleaning once a day is enough to sufficiently remove potential virus that may be on surfaces. Consider cleaning high-touch, shared surfaces more frequently.</p>