

DCHD Statement on COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in Schools **July 20, 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.

DCHD strongly recommends school districts begin the school year requiring that masks be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 years and older) who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19. 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 individuals who are unvaccinated 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 students to wear masks in school if they are not fully vaccinated will decrease the number of students who must stay home and quarantine as a result of their close contact to a COVID-19 case. This will result in more students staying in school – the goal we all share.**

Schools should be supportive of people who are fully vaccinated, but choose to continue to wear a mask, as a personal choice or because they have a medical condition that may weaken their immune system. If schools are not reliably or consistently able to assess and track COVID-19 vaccination status, then schools may consider expanding the masking requirement to all students and staff (irrespective of COVID-19 vaccination status), toward promoting a safe environment for in-person learning.

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](#)

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