



# Interim Recommendations for COVID-19 Prevention in Connecticut's PreK-12 Schools

Fall 2021

*Version Update: July 25, 2021*

# Background



## Updated CDC Guidance for K-12 Schools

- ▶ Released on July 9, 2021
- ▶ Recommendations for mitigation strategies for Fall 2021 school opening
- ▶ Not intended to revise summer operations (keep Spring 2021 strategies through summer)

## Updated Recommendations for CT Schools:

- ▶ Will be provided in the context of **existing and anticipated conditions**, and **experience from the prior school year** in our state
- ▶ Overarching goal is **100% in-person learning** for the entire 2021-2022 school year
- ▶ Currently working on consolidating messaging and finalizing written guidance



# Vaccination



## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ Vaccination is the **#1 prevention strategy** available to school districts for the coming year
- ▶ Effort to get all eligible students/staff fully vaccinated prior to the start of the school year

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ Consider timeframes for vaccination – **5 weeks from first Pfizer dose to fully vaccinated**
  - ▶ First shot **7/25**  Second shot **8/15**  Fully vaccinated **8/29**
- ▶ Work with DPH, CSDE, Local Health, Mobile Vans to assist with **vaccination clinics in 100% of CT school districts** for late-summer and early-fall
- ▶ Highlight/message to staff, students, and families the **advantages of being fully vaccinated for the coming school year**

# Mask Use



## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ **Indoors:** Masks should be used by unvaccinated individuals, or by everyone in situations where vaccine coverage is unknown or known to be low, case rates are increased, more contagious variants are circulating, and/or other factors warrant universal mask use
- ▶ **Outdoors:** Masks are generally not needed, may be needed by unvaccinated individuals in crowded or high-contact situations
- ▶ Make reasonable accommodations for individuals with a disability that prevents mask use

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ Current Executive Order regarding mask wearing in school buildings and other settings can be found here: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-12A.pdf>
- ▶ Federal Order (CDC) requires **mask use on public transportation, including school buses**
- ▶ Updates to mask guidance for the Fall 2021 school year will be finalized in the coming weeks



# Distancing and Cohorting

## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ 3 feet in classrooms is adequately protective, assuming other mitigation strategies are in use
- ▶ Having at least 3 feet between students in classrooms affects quarantine guidance
- ▶ Cohorting of classrooms can be relaxed if other mitigation strategies are strong

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ Maintain **at least 3 feet of physical distance in classrooms**, when feasible with available space; consider potential alternative spaces for instruction, if available
- ▶ **Do not exclude students from in-person learning** in order to meet minimum distance recommendations
- ▶ Implement distancing to the extent practical as part of a layered mitigation strategy in all areas of the school
- ▶ Though not required, **cohorting can still be used** as an additional layer of mitigation

# Screening Testing



## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ Screening testing can be a useful additional tool to **prevent outbreaks**, especially where other mitigation strategies cannot be used maximally (e.g., spacing)
- ▶ Screening testing should occur a **minimum of once weekly**, unvaccinated individuals only, consider things like community case rates, athletics

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ DPH/CSDE are prioritizing **offering voluntary testing** to public K-6 students and unvaccinated staff; private K-6 students and unvaccinated staff in high-risk communities; and unvaccinated 7th-12th graders in high-risk communities
- ▶ Recommend offering weekly **pooled PCR testing** through partners; testing partners will be assigned by DPH/CSDE to interested districts and partners will collect samples on school site
- ▶ Districts will be asked to collect consent forms, provide space, and promote screening testing program

# Ventilation



## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ Improving ventilation to **deliver more outdoor dilution air and better filtration** can reduce transmission risk in schools
- ▶ Consider non-central/non-mechanical ventilation strategies as well (e.g., open windows/doors, window exhaust fans, HEPA filters)

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ **Work with qualified and trusted professionals** to supplement your existing facilities staff
- ▶ **Re-Commission** central mechanical HVAC systems prior to the school year
- ▶ Make appropriate **adjustments/repairs to existing central systems**, considering full occupancy
- ▶ Make **smart, cost-effective, and manageable improvements** to central systems where possible, ensuring resources will be available for maintenance as well
- ▶ Consider which non-central components can be used best when and where needed



# Cleaning, Disinfection, Hygiene

## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ Contaminated surfaces are not a significant risk for transmission of SARS-CoV-2
- ▶ **Routine daily cleaning** is all that is needed in most areas of school buildings
- ▶ Limit disinfection to bathrooms, health offices/isolation space, known exposure areas

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ **Clean** (detergent-based) occupied areas of schools and buses **on a daily basis**
- ▶ **Clean and disinfect restrooms** at least once daily (EPA List N, CT Green Cleaning Laws)
- ▶ **Continuous spot disinfection** of high touch surfaces is **no longer necessary**
- ▶ Electrostatic sprayers, foggers, etc. are not necessary and don't increase effectiveness





# Isolation, Quarantine, Contacts

## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ **Vaccinated students and staff no longer need to quarantine** (if asymptomatic)
- ▶ **Any students seated at least 3 ft. away** from a case no longer need to quarantine if exposure was limited to the classroom (assuming contact is asymptomatic and consistent/correct mask use)
- ▶ Other isolation, quarantine, contact tracing guidance unchanged at this time

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ **Students seated 3 feet or more** from another student diagnosed with COVID-19 **do not need to quarantine**, as long as they remain asymptomatic and masks were in use in the classroom
- ▶ This exception to the contact definition applies to **exposures between students only**
- ▶ Supporting guidance (addenda) will be updated accordingly
- ▶ Encourage emphasis on identification of individual close contacts vs exclusion of entire classrooms when a case is identified

# Sports and Other Extracurriculars



## CDC Summary Messages:

- ▶ Activities should take place **outdoors if possible**, with consideration for spacing if feasible
- ▶ CDC recommends masking for unvaccinated individuals when activities are indoors or for **unvaccinated individuals** engaged in any high-intensity (enhanced respiration) activities (e.g., football, ice hockey, choir, dance, etc.)
- ▶ Recommend screening testing for unvaccinated participants regardless of case rates

## DPH/CSDE Recommendations:

- ▶ All **Fall athletics should plan to begin on time** this year and plan for full seasons
- ▶ **Fully vaccinated students/staff do not have to quarantine from sports or other activities**, provided they remain asymptomatic after close contact with a known COVID-19 case
- ▶ **Recommend weekly testing for unvaccinated** athletes/coaches
- ▶ The **higher the vaccination rate** on a team, the **more likely** they are to keep practicing, maintain their current schedule, and **complete their season**

# Other Considerations



## ▶ School buses

- ▶ Current **CDC Order requires masking** on public transportation, includes school buses
- ▶ **Opening bus windows** (even slightly) can greatly improve ventilation
- ▶ Assigned seating, controlled loading/unloading still good ideas but not required

## ▶ Visitor Policies

- ▶ **Review and communicate** rules for visitors and family engagement activities
- ▶ All visitors should be aware of, and comply with, mitigation strategies in use inside the school building
- ▶ Recommend non-essential visitors/meetings with outside individuals occur after the school day ends
- ▶ **Essential provider visits should continue without restrictions** (including based on vaccination status)

## ▶ Recess and Physical Education

- ▶ No change from Spring 2021 guidance: Masks not needed for outdoor recess/PE, encourage distancing, promote hand hygiene before/after outdoor activities

# Other Considerations



## ▶ Arts Instruction and Performance

- ▶ Recommendations largely unchanged for Fall 2021
- ▶ Move activities **outdoors** when/where practical
- ▶ **Extended distancing** (6 feet or more) is recommended where increased respiration is likely (e.g., wind instruments, singing, high-exertion dance, etc.)
- ▶ **Droplet control measures** should be implemented during activities with increased respiration (e.g., bell covers for wind instruments, etc.)

## ▶ Cafeterias and Meal Periods

- ▶ **Single use, disposable items are not required** for food service operations (low risk of transmission from shared items)
- ▶ Schools should assess available physical distance in cafeterias and consider whether or not it makes sense to displace instructional activities (e.g., phys. ed. instruction) for additional dining space
- ▶ Consider **adding lunch waves** to reduce person-density in cafeterias (meal timing waivers available)