

STATE OF MICHIGAN GUIDELINES FOR OPERATING SCHOOLS SAFELY

INTRODUCTION

The State of Michigan has set a goal that all school districts offer an in-person learning option for students as soon as possible, and no later than March 1st. The value of in-person schooling is immeasurable and we all want a return to normal by doing what is best for students, educators and parents. Governor Whitmer and the State of Michigan are working diligently with local school officials and community leaders to ensure schools can operate with proven mitigation measures in place.

Many students have struggled to succeed with distance learning, and the students facing the greatest challenges are disproportionately those who already face the most obstacles. Many of these students and their families need a face-to-face learning environment in order to learn and thrive. Some families will still choose for their children to continue learning remotely and some educators meet the CDC definition of high-risk – and we will continue to support these groups that wish to continue teaching and learning at a distance. We also know that in-person learning provides a key benefit for many parents who rely on their children being in school to be able to participate fully in the economy.

Over the last nine months, medical experts and epidemiologists have closely followed the data and have learned that schools can establish a low risk of transmission by ensuring that everyone wears a mask and adopting careful infection prevention protocols. It is critical that we take a fact-based approach by doing things like wearing face masks, washing hands, and practicing social distancing. As rapid testing access expands, we will have even more tools to make schools safer for students, educators, and other staff.

Schools are strongly encouraged to provide as much in-person learning as is feasible, especially for young learners (PK-5), economically disadvantaged learners, learners with special education needs, and English language learners. The goal should be to reach at least half-time for all students. Nevertheless, we recognize that schools may still need to close if they are experiencing an uncontrolled outbreak, or if they are unable to operate due to quarantined staff. And if cases again rise precipitously, schools may be subject to closure orders from state or local health departments. Unless subject to a closure order, school reopening and closing decisions will ultimately be made by local school districts.

This document collects and summarizes guidance for schools across a range of topics that are relevant to in-person school operations. Prior guidance based on state reopening phases or local case rate targets is now obsolete. In its place, this document recommends that, to reopen or remain open under levels of spread now prevailing statewide, schools should continue to adopt and implement strict infection-control measures. And it affirms that reopening decisions should be made locally, using a holistic assessment of multiple pandemic metrics, and considering the broader COVID context at a given time. Please note that this guidance is intended to update the June 30th, 2020 MI Safe Schools Roadmap.

This guidance is subject to change. MDHHS is carefully monitoring new developments, including the entry of a more transmissible COVID variant into the United States. This document may also be updated if new guidance is provided from the Centers for Disease Control.

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SARS-COV-2 TESTING IN SCHOOLS

Testing to diagnose COVID-19 is part of a comprehensive strategy and should be used in conjunction with promoting behaviors that reduce spread (e.g., mask use, social distancing, hand hygiene); maintaining healthy environments (e.g., cleaning and disinfection, ventilation); managing school operations (e.g., class sizes); and preparing for when someone gets sick.

Testing is not a requirement for schools to return to in-person learning. Schools that follow existing guidance carefully and diligently are not considered major risks for outbreaks. However, testing and early detection of cases may be one additional tool that may be used to allow for in-person instruction.

The state has worked with the Michigan High School Sports Association to pilot a testing program in 200 state high schools. Now that feasibility has been assessed, the state will roll out a voluntary program to offer weekly testing to educators in public schools. Additional pilot programs may also be offered to school districts that are interested in a limited amount of student testing for the purposes of surveillance.

Testing in schools is not a replacement for mitigation practices, including use of masks and social distancing.

VACCINATIONS

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has released a prioritization plan for COVID-19 vaccinations. Teachers and other school staff are classified as “frontline essential workers” under the MDHHS guidance and are now eligible to receive vaccinations with the start of Phase 1b. School districts will be working with state and local partners to arrange vaccination opportunities for school staff. Vaccination is not a requirement for schools to return to in-person learning.

MDHHS is following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for prioritization of distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines for adults. CDC recommendations are based on input from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). This federal advisory committee is made up of medical and public health experts who develop recommendations on the use of vaccines in the United States. ACIP recommended on 12/3/20 that both 1) health care personnel and 2) residents of long-term care facilities be offered COVID-19 vaccine in the initial phase of the vaccination program.

FEDERAL FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOLS

In December 2020, Congress passed and President Trump signed a bipartisan COVID-19 relief package that provides widespread economic aid, including significant financial support for schools. Michigan’s PK-12 schools are expected to receive more than \$1 billion, largely allocated through a formula driven by Title I. This is more than four times the amount allocated to schools from the original CARES Act.

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FEDERAL FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOLS CONT.

Among other allowable uses, schools may use these funds to implement infection mitigation strategies, including:

- Coordination of coronavirus response efforts
- Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies
- Training and professional development for staff of the local educational agency on sanitation
- Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean
- School facility improvements that reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental hazards
- Upgrades and maintenance to improve indoor air quality
- Other activities necessary to maintain operations

MDE will release more detailed guidance on district-by-district allocations and procedures for drawing down these funds.

SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Designated COVID-19 point of contact: Schools should designate a staff person, such as the school nurse, to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. All school staff and families should know who this person is and how to contact them.

Cohorting: If feasible, schools should divide students and teachers into distinct groups that stay together throughout an entire school day during in-person classroom instruction. Schools should limit mixing between groups such that there is minimal or no interaction between cohorts. Secondary schools may utilize larger cohorts of students than elementary schools.

Personal Protective Equipment: Per the [MDHHS December 18th Epidemic Order](#), face masks (as defined by MDHHS) must always be worn indoors by all staff and students 5 and older, except for meals and in other limited circumstances.

- Face masks may be made of three-ply cloth material or they may be disposable surgical or KN95 masks
- Masks should fit snugly, with no gaps, and should be worn over the nose and mouth
- Cloth face masks should be washed daily. Disposable face masks should be disposed of at the end of each day
- Plastic face shields or eye protection may be used in addition to cloth face masks for additional risk mitigation, if desired.
- Further guidance on masking is [available online](#).

Hand Hygiene: Provide adequate supplies to support hand hygiene (including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for safe use by staff and students, paper towels, tissues, and signs reinforcing proper hand washing techniques).

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SAFETY PROTOCOLS CONT.

Spacing and Movement:

- Maintain six feet of distance at all times.
- In instructional settings, space desks six feet apart, making creative use of all school spaces (e.g., gymnasiums, cafeterias, multi-purpose rooms).

If physical distancing of six feet cannot be maintained in instructional settings with an all in-person approach, schools should consider alternative strategies to reduce student density. This may include the use of a hybrid schedule that allows students to maintain six feet of distancing and attend in-person school for at least half-time.

If a school district nonetheless proceeds with in-person learning, at a minimum it should:

- Maintain minimum seated distance of three feet in classrooms
- Consider the feasibility of installing barriers/partitions for additional risk mitigation
- Ensure that when students are eating at lunch with masks off, they maintain six feet of physical distance to the extent feasible
- Class sizes should be kept to the level afforded by the spacing guidance listed above.

Ventilation:

- Increase outdoor air ventilation, using caution in highly polluted areas
 - When weather conditions allow, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors (if possible) unless this poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms)
 - Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows.
 - Position fans securely and carefully in or near windows to facilitate outdoor air exchange
 - Consider ventilation system upgrades or improvements after obtaining consultation from experienced Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) professionals and reviewing specific guidance (**American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic**)
- The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) **has a program to assist Michigan K-12 public schools** by providing recommendations to reduce infectious aerosol transmission via the heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems. This program surveys Michigan K-12 public schools to gather information on their HVAC systems. On completing the survey, schools are eligible to request an onsite inspection from a licensed HVAC contractor for recommendations
- Air filters should be changed on a more frequent basis and per manufacturers' guidance
- See **this EGLE document** and **this EPA website** for additional air quality best practices

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SYMPTOMATIC SCREENING

- Staff and students should screen for symptoms associated with COVID-19, at home, prior to coming to school. If they exhibit any respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms, or have a temperature of 100.4 or greater, they should stay home
- Every school should identify and designate a quarantine area and a staff person to care for students who become ill at school
- **Symptomatic individuals** may not attend school until they have tested negative on a molecular (PCR) test, or have completely recovered according to **CDC guidelines**.

RESPONDING TO POSITIVE TESTS

In the event of a lab or clinically diagnosed case of COVID-19, the school should immediately work with the local health department in accordance with guidelines to initiate an investigation and implement measures up to, and including, closure if necessary.

FOOD SERVICE, ATHLETICS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- As feasible, have children eat meals outdoors or in classrooms, while maintaining social distance (at least 6 feet apart), instead of in a communal dining hall or cafeteria
- Close communal use shared spaces such as dining halls if possible; otherwise, stagger use and clean and disinfect between use
- Recess and physical exercise classes should be conducted outside whenever possible with appropriate social distancing and cohorting of students
- Classes that involve physical contact among participants, a high degree of exhalation or physical exertion indoors, or where masks cannot be worn, should not be conducted at this time
- Activities that can be modified to allow social distancing or that require minimal physical contact can continue
- MDHHS orders should be consulted for the most recent requirements on which sports are permitted

SURFACES

- Use of shared objects (e.g., gym or physical education equipment, art supplies, toys, games) should be limited when possible, or cleaned between use
- **Frequently touched surfaces** including light switches, doors, benches, bathrooms, should be cleaned at least twice daily with either an **EPA-approved disinfectant** or diluted bleach solution

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WATER

- After a prolonged facility shutdown, to minimize the risk of lead or copper exposure, and Legionnaire's disease, follow [EPA's steps \(Training, Testing, and Taking Action\)](#) to ensure that all water systems and features are safe to use
- Restoring and maintaining water quality after extended shutdowns is key to protecting educators and students from exposure to health risks. EGLE recommends the development of a drinking water quality maintenance plan to reduce risks associated with low to no use of water
- Use [this checklist](#) for restoring and maintaining water quality
- Follow [EPA's steps \(Training, Testing, and Taking Action\)](#) to ensure that all water systems and features are safe to use
- Additional recommendation on improving the quality of school drinking water can be found [here](#)

WORKPLACE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Schools and their employees are covered by guidance issued by the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (MiOSHA) [October 14th Emergency Rules](#). These rules clearly outline the practices that all employers must undertake regarding employee screening, exposure notification, preparedness planning, infection prevention, health surveillance, personal protective equipment, and training. Schools are required to comply with all guidelines articulated by the October 14th rules. School districts should also consult federal guidance issued by the CDC entitled, "[Operating Schools during COVID-19: CDC's Considerations](#)" for additional information.

QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION PRECAUTIONS FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Staff and students who either test positive or are close contacts of those who test positive should follow the [guidance issued by MDHHS](#) as well as Local Health Departments. If individuals are considered close contacts, but do not have symptoms, they should nonetheless quarantine for 10 days, per CDC guidance. They should only resume normal activities if they have no symptoms.

Contacts who do exhibit symptoms should get tested immediately. Additional information is [available here](#).

CHILD CARE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Schools are strongly encouraged to allow child care and after school programming to occur in person in school buildings. Licensed child care providers should follow the "[Guidelines for Safe Child Care Operations During COVID-19](#)" issued by the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs.

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SCIENTIFIC STUDIES REGARDING SCHOOL RE-OPENING

The guidance in this document is informed by outbreak information throughout the state of Michigan, consultations with expert epidemiologists and clinicians, as well as the following studies and reports:

American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association, "Children and COVID-19: State Data Report: Summary of publicly reported data from 49 states, NYC, DC, PR, and GU," Published 12/17/2020, <https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP%20and%20CHA%20-%20Children%20and%20COVID-19%20State%20Data%20Report%2012.17.20%20FINAL.pdf>

Ingo E. Isphording, Marc Lipfert, and Nico Pestel, "School Re-Openings after Summer Breaks in Germany Did Not Increase SARS-CoV-2 Cases," IZA Institute of Labor Economics, October 2020, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp13790.pdf>

Brandon Guthrie, Jessie Seiler, and Lorenzo Tolentino et al., "Summary of Evidence Related to Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic," University of Washington COVID-19 Literature Report, October 19, 2020, https://depts.washington.edu/pandemicalliance/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/COVID-19-Schools-Summary_2020_10_19.pdf

Dyani Lewis, "Why schools probably aren't COVID hotspots," Nature, October 29, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02973-3>

Smriti Mallapaty, "How schools can reopen safely during the pandemic," Nature, August 18, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02403-4#ref-CR1>

Walter S. Gilliam, Aryn A. Malik, and Mehr Shafiq et al., "COVID-19 Transmission in US Child Care Programs," Pediatrics, December 2020, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2020/12/04/peds.2020-031971>

World Health Organization, "What we know about COVID-19 transmission in schools," October 21, 2020, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/risk-comms-updates/update39-covid-and-schools.pdf?sfvrsn=320db233_2