

Summary of Revisions to CDC/DHS/DPI Guidance for Schools – April 9, 2021

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#) was published March 19, 2021. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) has endorsed the CDC's recommendations. The Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) documents are based upon these recommendations from the CDC as endorsed by DHS and were updated.

Additionally, the Department of Education has revised [volume 1](#) of the *ED COVID-19 Handbook Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools* and published [volume 2](#) on April 9, 2021. The following is a summary of the revisions and new guidance from CDC, DHS and DPI.

CDC Guidance Key Points

1. Evidence suggests that many K-12 schools that have strictly implemented prevention strategies have been able to safely open for in-person instruction and remain open.
2. CDC's K-12 operational strategy presents a pathway for schools to provide in-person instruction safely through consistent use of prevention strategies, including universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing.
3. All schools should implement and layer prevention strategies and should prioritize universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing.
4. Testing to identify individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection and vaccination for teachers and staff provide additional layers of COVID-19 protection in schools.
5. Clarified that ventilation is a component of strategies to clean and maintain healthy facilities.
6. Removed recommendation for physical barriers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its K-12 school guidance to reflect the latest science on physical distance between students in classrooms. CDC now recommends that, **with universal masking**, students should maintain a distance of at least 3 feet **in classroom settings in some situations**. CDC has updated its operational strategy to say:

- In elementary schools, CDC recommends all students remain at least 3 feet apart in classrooms **where mask use is universal** – **regardless of whether community transmission is low, moderate, substantial, or high**.
- In middle and high schools, CDC also recommends students should be at least 3 feet apart in classrooms **where mask use is universal and in communities where transmission is low, moderate, or substantial**.
- Middle school students and high school **students should be at least 6 feet apart in communities where transmission is high, if cohorting is not possible**. Cohorting is when groups of students are kept together with the same peers and staff throughout the school day to reduce the risk for spread throughout the school. This recommendation is because COVID-19 transmission dynamics are different in older students – that is, they are more likely to be exposed to SARS-CoV-2 and spread it than younger children.

The above recommendations are for students in classrooms. CDC continues to recommend at least 6 feet of distance:

- Between adults in the school building and between adults and students.
- In common areas, such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
- When masks can't be worn, such as when eating.
- During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band

practice, sports, or exercise. These activities should be moved outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces whenever possible. (The DHS currently does not recommend singing or playing of wind instruments indoors.)

- In community settings outside of the classroom.

Close Contacts and Quarantine

The definition of “close contact” has not changed.

Close contact: An individual is considered a close contact if **any** of following is true. If they:

- Were within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes total in a day.
- Had physical contact with the person.
- Had direct contact with the respiratory secretions of the person (for example, from coughing, sneezing, contact with dirty tissue, shared drinking glass, food, or other personal items).
- Lives with or stayed overnight for at least one night in a household with the person.

These close contact criteria apply regardless of mask use, face shields, or physical barriers, such as Plexiglas or plastic barriers. The only exception is if a health care worker in a school setting is wearing the proper personal protective equipment. (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02757.pdf>)

Explanation: Therefore, the guidance on quarantine has not changed if a district is implementing three (3) feet of physical distancing between students. The science on the transmission of the SARS-CoV2 virus has not changed. It is still recommended to stay six (6) feet away to limit the risk of transmitting or “catching” COVID-19. CDC guidance premises the benefit of getting students back to in person instruction outweighs the risks of spreading COVID-19 when schools use layered mitigation strategies to fidelity. It is not that SARS-CoV2 is felt to no longer be transmittable in the air beyond three (3) feet.

See DHS [Post-Vaccination Guidance for Schools](#) for how to manage quarantine for **educators who are fully vaccinated**. Even after teachers and staff are vaccinated, schools will need to continue to follow the recommended mitigation strategies for the foreseeable future, including requiring masks in schools and physical distancing.

DPI Interim COVID-19 Infection Control and Mitigation Measures for Schools

- Introduction updated to include current community transmission status in Wisconsin including variants, and use of new CDC guidelines
- CDC data tracker and other resources and webpages listed for convenience
- Addition of staff quarantine section for fully vaccinated educators
- Physical distancing and cohorting section revised per CDC guidelines emphasizing importance of cohorting given no change in close contact definition
- Statement of support for wearing of masks in schools in absence of statewide mask mandate
- Includes statement that while DHS does not recommend singing and playing of musical instruments indoors should a school decide to hold singing and playing of wind instruments indoors, various professional music education associations have provided guidance on how to lower the risk of those activities

DPI Interim COVID Transportation Guidance

Guidance is reflective of the [federal order](#) requiring masks on school buses and other forms of public transportation in the United States.

- Removed suggestion of Plexiglas barrier around bus driver.
- Maintains wording that optimum distance of at least six feet or physically separate students should be implemented to the full extent possible. Buses are not classroom settings.
- Includes new link for training on proper safety and/or disinfection procedures for school buses (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/rideshare-drivers-for-hire.html>)