



IDPH and ISBE Joint Summary of CDC's Operational Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) have updated this joint summary, fully adopting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#) (updated as of August 11, 2022). This updated guidance supersedes all prior COVID-19 school guidance documents and applies to public and nonpublic schools that serve students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (pre-K-12).

Schools and local health departments should exercise their longstanding authority, including as described in the [Communicable Disease Code](#) and according to schools' infectious disease policies, to address all infectious disease cases among students and staff. IDPH and ISBE strongly encourage schools to follow the CDC's operational guidance on best practices and the recommendations of their local health department on [isolation](#) for confirmed and probable cases. Schools also are encouraged to follow the CDC's best practices for all infectious diseases to keep students home if ill and use testing to confirm or rule out COVID-19 and other infection. Schools must continue to provide [remote learning](#) to any student who is under isolation for COVID-19 based on the State Superintendent's Remote Learning Declaration.

Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to prevent adverse outcomes related to COVID-19. People who are [up to date with COVID-19 vaccines](#) are at low risk of severe infection, hospitalization, and death. To promote vaccination in school communities, Section 3 of [Executive Order 2021-22](#) was reissued and remains in effect. Accordingly, school personnel must establish they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or submit to at least weekly testing for COVID-19.

On February 25, 2022, the CDC released a [new framework](#) to monitor the level of COVID-19 in communities that includes hospitalizations, hospital capacity, and cases. This approach focuses recommendations on minimizing severe disease, limiting strain on the health care system, and enabling those at highest risk to protect themselves against infection and severe disease. Rather than focusing on eliminating all virus transmission, the CDC recommends prevention measures, such as masks, when the level of severe disease in communities has the potential to overwhelm the health care system. These prevention measures can reduce that strain and avoid crisis.

The [CDC school guidance](#) aligns with [Community Levels](#) for recommendations for masking and testing for high-risk activities (e.g., close contact sports or band) or during key times in the year (e.g., prom or return from breaks). Community levels can help schools and local health departments, as well as individuals, make decisions based on their local context and their unique needs. When communities are at a "high" level, the CDC recommends universal indoor



masking as masks are critical to keeping classrooms open for in-person learning. In all Community Levels, staff and students with COVID-19-like symptoms or a positive test, should wear a mask around others. Schools should also consider implementing screening testing for high-risk activities, such as indoor sports and extracurricular activities, when students are returning from breaks, and for those serving students who are at high risk for getting very sick with COVID-19. The following chart summarizes masking and testing recommendations at the three Community Levels.

COVID-19 Community Level	Prevention Strategy for Masking	Prevention Strategy for Testing
Low	Support those who choose to continue to mask.	Ensure access to diagnostic testing for symptomatic persons and those exposed, and screening testing during outbreaks.
Medium	Person who are immunocompromised, at high risk for severe disease, or have household or social contacts at high risk for severe disease, should be encouraged to talk to their health care providers about whether they need to wear a mask.	Ensure access to diagnostic testing for close contacts and those exposed, and screening testing during outbreaks.
High	Universal masking indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status, should be promoted. Persons who are immunocompromised should be encouraged to wear a mask or respirator that provides greater protection.	Ensure access to diagnostic testing for close contacts and those exposed, and screening during outbreaks and for high-risk activities or before/after large events

Masks continue to be federally required in health care settings and for health care personnel, including school nurse offices.

The updated [CDC guidance](#) continues to recommend “strategies for everyday operations” or actions schools can take every day to prevent the spread of infectious disease, including the virus that causes COVID-19. The following strategies should be in place at all Community Levels:

- Promote staying up to date with all routine vaccinations.
- Implement policies that encourage students and staff to stay home when sick.
- Optimize [ventilation systems](#).
- Reinforce proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Utilize proper cleaning and disinfection procedures.

The following COVID-19 prevention strategies outlined in the CDC guidance remain important to protect students and community members, especially those who are not up to date on COVID-19 vaccination, and in areas where the [COVID-19 community levels](#) are medium or high,



and to allow schools to safely deliver in-person instruction. Schools, with help from local health departments, should consider local context when selecting strategies to prioritize for implementation. Schools should balance risk of COVID-19 with educational, social, and mental health outcomes when deciding which prevention strategies to put in place.

- Masking for those testing positive for COVID-19 when returning, for those with suspect or known exposure to a COVID-19 case, in health care settings, and for those that choose to wear a mask (universal masking is recommended by CDC when Community Levels are high).
- [Diagnostic testing](#) to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks, and screening testing when Community Levels are high for high-risk events (e.g., close contact sports or band) or key times in the year (e.g., prom or return from breaks).
- Management of Cases and Exposures. Schools should continue to manage ill persons per the [COVID-19 Interim Guidance For Schools Decision Tree for Evaluating Symptomatic Individuals from Pre-K-12 Schools](#). For those [exposed](#), **quarantine is no longer recommended by CDC**. (Note: CDC no longer defines Close Contacts but addresses [factors that indicate higher transmission risk](#).) Staff, volunteers, and students who have been exposed should follow CDC's recommendations to wear a well-fitted mask and get tested. Quarantine is a key component to Test to Stay programs. Since quarantine is no longer recommended for people who are exposed to COVID-19 except in certain high-risk congregate settings, Test to Stay (TTS) is no longer needed. If any school or ECE program chooses to continue requiring quarantine, they may also choose to continue TTS.
- Responding to outbreaks by increasing prevention strategy (e.g., masking, screening testing or decreasing events where crowding exists) to reduce transmission even when Community Levels are low. During outbreaks, using a Test to Stay approach using either Shield and/or home testing can assist in mitigating the outbreak. Sample letters are available from your local health department to send to parents with recommended testing cadence.
- Consideration for High-Risk Activities, including screening testing as described above, or consider temporarily stopping these activities to control an outbreak. Early childhood education programs may also consider layering prevention strategies, such as masking, when close contact occurs, such as during feeding and diapering young children and infants.