

FALL 2021 GUIDANCE FOR DANE COUNTY K-12 SCHOOLS

This document was created in partnership with The UW Pediatric Medical Advisory Group

Section 1: Strategies to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Evidence gathered over the last year has provided a framework to facilitate consistent in-person learning that minimizes disease transmission.¹ We know that **the most effective way to prevent transmission in schools is to support your community being vaccinated.**

In addition, given the contagiousness of the Delta variant and a recent uptick in cases, we strongly recommend universal masking for all teachers, staff, and students in schools, regardless of vaccination status. The federal government may have mandatory masking requirements in place for school bussing. Check the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#) webpage for information.

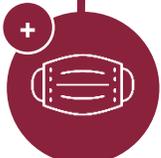
Implementing all prevention strategies listed below provides the best opportunity to offer safe and consistent in-person schooling. Based on [CDC guidance](#), the following prevention strategies should be layered to reduce spread. When working together, these strategies have a greater impact than any one strategy on its own.



TOP PRIORITY: Promoting vaccination

Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students, as well as teachers, staff, and household members, is the most critical strategy to help schools safely resume full operations.

People 12 years and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. Schools can promote vaccinations among teachers, staff, families, and eligible students by providing information about COVID-19 vaccination, encouraging vaccine trust and confidence, and establishing supportive policies and practices that make vaccination as easy and convenient as possible.



TOP PRIORITY: Consistent and correct mask use for all teachers, staff, and students in schools, regardless of vaccination status

Masks can help to provide protection from COVID-19. Consistent and correct mask use is especially important indoors and in crowded outdoor settings, when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

- **Indoors:** Mask use is recommended for all teachers, staff, and students in schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- **Outdoors:** In general, people do not need to wear masks outdoors. Unvaccinated people should consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained, close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.



Staying home when sick and getting tested

Students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as COVID-19 or the flu, should stay home and get tested. Staying home when sick with COVID-19 is essential to keep infections out of schools and prevent spread to others. If a person develops COVID-19 symptoms or is a close contact, they should get tested. In addition to community testing sites, testing for COVID-19 is available and free to all Wisconsin schools through the [DHS School Testing program](#).

¹ [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html)



Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Diligent attention to handwashing is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses. Modeling and practicing respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) is another important tool to decrease spread of illnesses including COVID-19. Schools should monitor and reinforce those behaviors and provide adequate, easily accessible handwashing supplies.



Physical distancing

CDC continues to recommend that people who are not fully vaccinated maintain physical distance of at least three feet from other people at school. However, a school or district should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement. Several [studies](#) from the 2020 – 2021 school year show low COVID-19 transmission levels among students in schools that had less than six feet of physical distance when the school implemented universal masking and other layered prevention strategies.² With consistent and correct mask use of unvaccinated people, less attention may be paid to distancing, and most school activities can resume without distancing constraints when masks are in place. Distancing remains important where masks are not worn, including when eating.



Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine

Schools should continue to collaborate with state and local health departments to confidentially provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, to the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws. This allows identifying which students, teachers, and staff with positive COVID-19 test results should isolate and which close contacts should quarantine.

Schools should follow [our Exclusion Chart](#). The Exclusion Chart outlines how unvaccinated people should quarantine after a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19, unless both people were masked at school. If all individuals are masked, a modified quarantine allows for all individuals to forego quarantine in order to attend school, regardless of vaccination status. See our [Exclusion Chart](#) for more information.



Ventilation

Improving ventilation can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. Along with other preventive strategies, including wearing a well-fitting, multi-layered mask, bringing fresh outdoor air into a building helps keep virus particles from concentrating inside. This can be done by opening multiple doors and windows, using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, or making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.



Cleaning and disinfection

In general, cleaning once a day is enough to sufficiently remove potential virus that may be on surfaces. Visit the [CDC's website](#) for more information on proper cleaning and disinfection.



Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks

CDC recommends offering screening testing depending on community transmission, population, and activity. See the [CDC website](#) for more information.

² [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html)

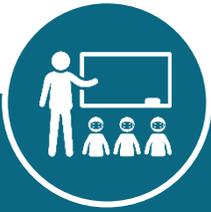
Section 2: Impact of Mask Requirements on Health and Safety, Education, and Operations

The table below outlines the anticipated impacts on health, safety, education, and school operations in the fully masked vs optional mask school environment. School leaders, stakeholders, and communities should carefully consider these impacts when determining policies for the fall as they aim to provide consistent, equitable access to in-person instruction for all students.

Domains	Masks Required for all teachers, staff, and students in schools	Masks Optional
 <p>Health and Safety</p>	<p>Safest option.</p> <p>Highest probability of preventing COVID-19 infection.</p> <p>Likely to prevent or decrease transmission of many non-COVID respiratory viruses.</p>	<p>If COVID-19 cases are introduced into unvaccinated school population, spread is likely, particularly among unmasked.</p> <p>Increased risk for those children and staff unable to be vaccinated or vulnerable to severe effects of COVID-19 including children who have complex health needs. These students may require special accommodation and consideration to safely attend school in a mask optional environment.</p>
 <p>Education</p>	<p>Most likely to lead to consistent, in-person learning for the largest number of students.</p> <p>Eliminates need for missed school (unmasked exposures would still need to quarantine; fully masked exposures would not need to quarantine from school, but would still need to quarantine from extracurricular activities and outside of school).</p> <p>Likely to have fewer absences for non-COVID respiratory infections than in the masked environment (COVID and non-COVID respiratory illness cannot be distinguished without testing. Each new respiratory infection requires exclusion from school and testing. Fewer infections of any type will lead to fewer missed days of school).</p> <p>Learning activities do not need to be impacted by distancing, cohorting.</p> <p>School day/educational activities can largely occur as they typically would (circle time, small group work, specials/encore courses in typical areas, etc).</p>	<p>Likely to impact learning mode, exposure, and consistency for some students.</p> <p>Standard quarantine rules must be applied in cases of COVID-19 exposure.</p> <p>Absenteeism may increase.</p> <p>Layered protection measures such as distancing and cohorting are increasingly important. Less movement throughout the school, additional space needs, and cohorting may impact learning environment and opportunities for socialization.</p>
 <p>Operations</p>	<p>Least disruptive & costly from an operations standpoint.</p> <p>Testing capacity important but may be utilized less frequently than in a mask optional environment.</p> <p>Lower administrative burden with respect to quarantine related tasks due to decreased transmission.</p> <p>Physical distancing does not impede daily operations – day can largely proceed normally (with the exception of lunch which requires modification/distancing given unmasked).</p>	<p>Increased cost & complexity of operations.</p> <p>Increased need for nursing & staff support for testing, follow up phone calls due to absences and contact tracing.</p> <p>Will need robust testing capacity. Operations will need to account for distancing, cohorting.</p>

Section 3: Comparing Masking Policies throughout a Typical School Day

School 1: Masks required for all teachers, students, and staff in schools



A student comes in to school with a headache. He goes to class, where everyone is seated close together. He comes into close contact with other students throughout the day.



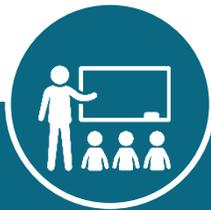
During lunch, he eats six feet apart from other students while eating unmasked.



That night, he develops a fever and a cough. His parents/guardians send him to school the next day, where he is sent home in the morning for COVID symptoms. His test comes back positive.

Outcome: Even though he came into close contact with other students throughout the day, **no other students or staff need to miss school because they were all masked or vaccinated.** It is still recommended that all vaccinated people get tested 5 - 7 days after exposure. This school has decreased the burden of quarantine on other students and families. This school has also freed up time for the nursing staff because they don't have to provide COVID tests to the identified close contacts.

School 2: Masks Optional for all teachers, students, and staff in schools.



A student comes in to school with a headache. He goes to class, where everyone is seated close together. He comes into close contact with other students throughout the day.



During lunch, he eats in close proximity to other students.



That night, he develops a fever and a cough. His parents/guardians send him to school the next day, where he is sent home in the morning for COVID symptoms. His test comes back positive.

Outcome: Because he was not wearing a mask, all students who came in close contact with him will need to quarantine for a minimum of 7 days. They will all need a negative test on day 6 to be released from quarantine. Since many of the other children in the classroom likely have siblings in other classrooms, there will be fear and uncertainty among parents about whether they should send their other children to school.