

**Montgomery County Office of Public Health**  
**Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention for K to 12 Schools**  
**2021-2022 School Year**

Montgomery County Office of Public Health (MCOPH) provides the below recommendations for the Montgomery County school community to adopt as part of their school health and safety plans for prevention of disease transmission in the school environment. Recommendations were developed in collaboration with Montgomery County Public School Superintendents and Private School Leadership, and reflect data and evidence related to the prevention and control of COVID-19 available at the time of publication.

Prevention Strategy	Recommendation Vs. Requirement	Guidance
<p><b>Promotion of COVID-19 Vaccination</b></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>COVID-19 vaccination among all eligible students as well as teachers, staff, and their respective household members is the most critical strategy to help schools safely maintain full, in-person operations.</p> <p>A <a href="#">growing body of evidence</a> suggests that people who have completed the <a href="#">primary series</a> (and a <a href="#">booster</a> when eligible) are at substantially reduced risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 compared with people who are not vaccinated.</p> <p>When infections occur among people who are vaccinated, they tend to be milder than among those who are unvaccinated. Even vaccinated people who are infected can be infectious and can spread the virus to others. To reduce the risk of becoming infected with SARS-CoV-2 and spreading the virus to others, students, teachers, and school staff should continue to use layered prevention strategies.</p> <p>Schools can <a href="#">promote vaccinations</a> 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 getting vaccinated as easy and convenient as possible. Please go to <a href="http://www.montcopa.org/covid-19vaccine">www.montcopa.org/covid-19vaccine</a> for more information on COVID-19 vaccinations.</p>
<p><b>Stay Home When Sick</b></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Encourage staff, students and parent(s)/guardian(s) to stay home if sick to help support reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other illnesses/disease.</p>

<p><b>Physical Distancing</b></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Physical distancing is one of several strategies for maintaining safe, in-person learning. To the extent possible, schools should assess and implement physical distancing recommendations in classroom and other settings within their structures. but students should not be excluded from in-person learning in order to keep a minimum distance requirement.</p> <p><u>Recommended Distancing:</u> CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as screening testing, cohorting, improved ventilation, handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes, staying home when sick with symptoms of infectious illness including COVID-19, and regular cleaning to help reduce transmission risk. A distance of at least 6 feet is recommended between students and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated.</p> <p><b>Cohorting:</b> Cohorting means keeping people together in a small group and having each group stay together throughout an entire day. Cohorting can be used to limit the number of students, teachers, and staff who come in contact with each other, especially when it is challenging to maintain physical distancing, such as among young children, and particularly in areas of medium-to-high transmission levels. The use of cohorting can limit the spread of COVID-19 between cohorts, but should not replace other prevention measures within each group. Cohorting people who are fully vaccinated and people who are not fully vaccinated into separate cohorts is <u>not</u> recommended.</p>
<p><b>Masking Policies</b></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>MCOPH aligns its recommended mitigation strategies, including masking, with <a href="#">CDC's Community Level</a> guidance. This guidance can be used as a tool to help communities decide which prevention steps to take based on both new cases and hospitalization data in order to prevent severe disease and preserve the healthcare system.</p> <p>Additional COVID-19 guidance for individual and household level prevention and community-level prevention based on COVID-19 Community Level can be found at <a href="#">CDC Community Levels, COVID-19 Community Level and COVID-19 Prevention</a></p> <p><u>Masking in Indoor Settings:</u> Masking in indoor public settings is recommended for all individuals at the high community COVID level. Individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness should consult with their healthcare provider about whether they should wear a mask and take other precautions at medium and low community COVID levels.</p> <p>MCOPH recommends that schools implement masking recommendations or requirements for all when Montgomery County COVID-19 Community Level is high, and consider appropriate masking</p>

		<p>recommendations for their school community at medium and low levels based on the school community's risk and in conjunction with other mitigation strategies.</p> <p><u>Masking on buses and vans operated by public or private school systems</u>: Effective February 25, 2022, CDC does not require wearing masks on <a href="#">buses or vans operated by public or private school systems</a>, including early care and education/child care programs. Masks are still required on public transportation, including airplanes, trains, subways, buses, and taxis.</p>
<b>Isolation and Quarantine</b>	Required	<p><u>Isolation and Quarantine</u> is required in accordance with Montgomery County Public Health Code, <a href="#">Chapter 3</a>, Communicable and Non-communicable Diseases. Recommendations for isolation, quarantine and testing is provided and updated on <a href="#">MCOPH School Exclusion Recommendations</a>.</p>
<b>Contact Tracing</b>	Required	<p>Contact Tracing is one of several strategies for prevention and containment of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. Contact tracing for COVID-19 in school settings focuses on the prevention of severe disease and response to outbreaks in the school setting. Contact tracing and notification requirements are defined by number of cases, event, and setting.</p> <p><u>Single Case of COVID-19</u>: Upon notification of an individual who has COVID-19 and that attended/worked at school while infections, schools are required to provide broad-based exposure notification to all individuals who were in the setting of exposure (e.g., classroom, bus, extra-curricular activities). For example, if a student has tested positive and was in school while suspected to be <a href="#">infectious</a> then a notification should be sent to all individuals who were in the classroom with that student for awareness of possible exposure. In addition to the broad-based notification, schools need to contact individuals in the exposure setting who are immunocompromised and/or at risk for severe disease to discuss risk exposure, prevention strategies, and referral to consult with their health care provider for risk assessment.</p> <p><u>Outbreak of COVID-19</u>: MCOPH defines an outbreak as 3 or more cases of COVID-19 among students and/or staff, without other identified epidemiological linkages within 14 days, in a single classroom or core group (e.g., team, band). When an outbreak is identified, schools are required to complete contact tracing to identify any close contacts to the positive cases. Guidance on definition of close contact and quarantine provided on <a href="#">MCOPH School Exclusion Recommendations</a>. During the time of an outbreak response, schools should reach out to MCOPH for additional guidance for changes to prevention strategies to decrease risk of spread (e.g., masking, testing).</p>
<b>Reporting</b>	Required	<p>MCOPH requires weekly aggregate reporting (cumulative summary) of COVID-19 cases, close contacts, school-based testing and outbreaks in the school setting via a confidential electronic survey. Email <a href="mailto:MCSchoolsCovid19@montcopa.org">MCSchoolsCovid19@montcopa.org</a> with any questions and guidance school reporting.</p>

<p><b>School-Based Testing</b>  <a href="#">Project ACT-IT</a>  <a href="#">Operation E.T.</a>  <a href="#">GINKO</a></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Testing can be used to help evaluate and adjust prevention strategies and provide added protection for schools that are not able to provide optimal physical distance between students.</p> <p>Schools/Districts should consider the following COVID-19 testing strategies in their school communities to reduce the risk of in-school transmission and support in-person learning. Implementation of selected strategies may vary based on community COVID level, school risk profile, and other factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptomatic testing for those who develop symptoms during the school day</li> <li>• Assurance testing of select groups to detect asymptomatic infection</li> <li>• Outbreak Response</li> </ul> <p>Additional Testing Strategies:</p> <p><u>Mask To Stay:</u> Mask to Stay (MTS) is a COVID-19 prevention strategy that allows staff and students who are exposed to COVID-19 in school or in the community, who are asymptomatic, and would have to quarantine because of vaccination status to continue to attend school. Individuals who are participating in MTS are required to wear a mask at all times when around other people for ten days after the date of exposure <b>and</b> must agree to antigen testing per <a href="#">MCOPH Mask to Stay Guidance</a>. For additional guidance/recommendations on MTS see <a href="#">MCOPH Mask to Stay Guidance</a>.</p> <p><u>Test To Stay:</u> Test to Stay (TTS) is a COVID-19 prevention strategy that allows staff members who have received their primary series of COVID vaccine but have not received a booster dose, who are identified as a household contact to a case of COVID-19, AND who remain asymptomatic to continue to attend school while committing to a daily testing cadence. Individuals who are participating in TTS are required to wear a mask at all times when around other during their quarantine period and must agree to antigen testing per <a href="#">MCOPH Test to Stay Guidance</a>.</p>
<p><b>Ventilation</b></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Ventilation is an important COVID-19 prevention strategy that can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. Along with other prevention strategies, 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, and making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.</p> <p>During transportation, open or crack windows in buses and other forms of transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk. Keeping windows open a few inches improves air circulation.</p>
<p><b>Hand Hygiene and</b></p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Practice handwashing and respiratory etiquette to keep from getting and spreading infectious illnesses including COVID-19.</p>

<b>Respiratory Etiquette</b>		<p>Handwashing/hand sanitizing: Schools should encourage hand hygiene to prevent spread of virus. Hand washing includes washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Hand hygiene strategies should be encouraged after using the bathroom, before eating, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, and after touching your face.</p> <p>Respiratory etiquette: Encourage respiratory etiquette which includes covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, using tissues and throwing them away, and washing your hands or using hand sanitizer every time you touch your mouth or nose.</p>
<b>Cleaning and Disinfection</b>  <a href="#"><i>CDC Cleaning and Disinfection EPA-Registered Products</i></a>	Recommendation	<p>Follow standard practices and appropriate regulations specific to your type of facility for minimum standards regarding cleaning and disinfection.</p> <p>Cleaning with products containing soap or detergent reduces germs on surfaces by removing contaminants and decreases risk of infection from surfaces.</p> <p>Disinfecting kills any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection.</p> <p>Increase cleaning frequency or choose to disinfect (in addition to cleaning) in shared spaces if the space is a high traffic area or if certain conditions apply that can increase the risk of infection from touching surfaces: high level of community risk or the space is occupied by people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.</p> <p>If there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in your facility within the last 24 hours, you should clean AND disinfect the space the positive individual spent time in while infectious.</p>

Additional consideration not provided by MCOPH is available through CDC’s COVID-19 Prevention Strategies Most Important for Safe In-School Learning K-12 schools. [COVID-19 Prevention Strategies Most Important for Safe In-School Learning K-12 schools](#)

**References:**

1. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools, Updated Jan. 13, 2022](#)
2. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Handwashing in Communities: Clean Hands Save Lives, Reviewed Aug. 10, 2021](#)
3. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Prioritizing Case Investigations and Contact Tracing for COVID-19, Updated February 28, 2022](#)
4. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Requirements for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs, Updated February 25, 2022](#)
5. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Use and Care of Masks, Updated Feb. 25, 2022](#)
6. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 by County, Updated Feb. 25, 2022](#)

7. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Order: Wearing of face masks while on conveyances and at transportation hubs, Updated June 10, 2021](#)
8. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Science Brief: COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination, Updated Sept. 15, 2021](#)
9. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines Currently Approved or Authorized in the United States, Updated Feb. 22, 2022](#)
10. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Shots, Updated Feb. 2, 2022](#)
11. [Center for Disease Control and prevention, How Schools Can Support COVID-19 Vaccination, Updated Nov. 15, 2021](#)
12. [Montgomery County Office of Public Health, COVID-19 VACCINE](#)