



Milwaukee Health Department K-12 Reopening Guidance 2021-2022 School Year

As Milwaukee children and staff return to school for the 2021-2022 school year, the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) will continue to provide supplemental COVID-19 mitigation guidance based on recommendations from Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the WI Department of Health Services (DHS), other public health entities, and our local environment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Last year, schools made great efforts to implement mitigation strategies to successfully decrease the spread of COVID-19. These deliberate and painstaking measures minimized the transmission of COVID-19 and outbreaks within school environments. Moving into the 2021-2022 school year, the MHD urges schools to continue to build on that success.

The MHD recognizes the CDC as the authoritative body on public health. We have based our recommendations on the CDC's [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) in combination with additional resources, including local data and trends.

This document serves as supplemental guidance and does not supersede new or updated guidance per the CDC or any statewide or local public health orders or ordinances. Users may refer directly to the CDC's guidance for additional information not covered here.

Key Points

- Local data shows increasing trends of case positivity.
- Schools are not required to submit safety plans before reopening.
- Remote or hybrid learning models may be appropriate for situations where a particular population might be under isolation or quarantine.
- Schools should include COVID-19 safety protocols as a part of their regular operations manuals for communicable disease management.
- Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to prevent COVID-19 and mass school or classroom closures. Promoting vaccination can help school safely return to in-person learning.
- Prevention of COVID-19 includes a combination of multiple mitigation strategies, including universal masking, regardless of vaccination status, to provide the safest environment possible for students and staff.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Vaccination**
- **Masking**
- **Physical Distancing**
- **Screening & Testing**

VACCINATION

Schools should encourage all eligible individuals to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The MHD is available to assist with vaccination clinics.



The CDC states, “Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. People who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are at low risk of symptomatic or severe infection.”

The city of Milwaukee vaccination rate for individuals ages 12-15 continues to fall below 25%. The vaccination rate for individuals ages 16 and older is just over 50%. Additionally, a significant portion of the student population is not eligible for vaccination at this time.

MASKING

Masking remains one of the key mitigation strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for all populations.

K-12 schools are settings with high mixing of vaccinated and unvaccinated people because COVID-19 vaccines are not available to children under 12.

Consistent with the CDC’s updated guidance, **the MHD strongly recommends universal masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors over the age of 2, regardless of vaccination status.** The MHD additionally recommends that schools require masks for all unvaccinated individuals.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing is a critical tool in decreasing the spread of COVID-19. In general, the CDC recommends people who are not fully vaccinated maintain [physical distance](#) of at least 6 feet from other people who are not in their household. However, several [studies](#) from the 2020-2021 school year show low COVID-19 transmission levels among students in schools that had less than 6 feet of physical distance when the school implemented and layered prevention strategies, such as masking.

Based on studies from 2020-2021 school year, **the CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by people regardless of vaccination status, to reduce transmission risk.** When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as masking, 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. Lastly, a mask is NOT a substitute for physical distancing.

The MDH encourages cohorting students as an additional layer of mitigation, especially when it is difficult to maintain physical distancing at 3 ft.

SCREENING and TESTING

The **MHD recommends all schools have screening and testing strategies in place to quickly identify infectious individuals.** Schools should reinforce the message that students and staff should not attend school when they are sick, and that when a student or staff can return to school will depend on the duration of illness, type of symptoms, lab testing for COVID-19 and other illnesses, and whether or not the student has been in close contact with an individual with COVID-19. Please refer to the WI Department of Health Services (DHS) and WI Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for additional resources for k-12 testing.



To assist public and private schools in operating safely, DHS has received federal funding to develop a program to support school-based COVID-19 testing for teachers, staff, students, and their families. More information about this program found [here](#).

Lastly, the CDC recommends that **fully vaccinated individuals get tested 3-5 days after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and continue to wear a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status.**

CONCLUSION

The Milwaukee Health Department will continue to work with schools with the shared goal of keeping our children and school staff safe.

The MHD contact tracing/nurse resource team will be available as a resource for schools for any COVID-19 questions or needs.

References and Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics – [Recommendations for Opening Schools in Fall 2021](#)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
 - o [Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs](#)
 - o [Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People](#)
- Milwaukee Health Department
 - o [Free Community Testing Sites](#)
 - o [COVID-19 Vaccine](#) (mobile vaccination clinic schedule)
- WI Department of Health Services
 - o [COVID-19: K-12 Schools](#)
 - o [COVID-19: K-12 School Testing Program](#)
 - o [Guidelines for Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in WI](#)
- Wisconsin Immunization Program – [Requirements for Schools](#)