



Dear Superintendents,

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) understands the importance and benefits of in-person learning and we are working diligently to prepare for students and staffs to return to the classroom this Fall. TCHD appreciates all of the hard work and collaborative efforts from our school partners to help foster a safe learning environment, reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in the school setting and protect the health of our students, teachers, staff, and community members. In response to newly released school guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and the [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment](#) (CDPHE), TCHD has compiled additional information that we hope will assist our school leaders in planning for the 2021-22 school year.

### **Recommendation for Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas County Schools to Follow CDPHE Guidance for Low-Risk Counties**

Vaccinations are the leading prevention strategy in order to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. We applaud all the efforts our school partners have undergone to promote vaccinations within their communities. In the updated CDPHE school guidance, the state defines 70% as a high rate of community vaccination which, in turn, impacts which mitigation strategies are recommended for schools. As of July 22, Douglas County's rate is 70%, and TCHD projects that Adams (65.2%) and Arapahoe (65.7%) will surpass that goal by the time students and staff return to school in the Fall. We recognize the challenges of planning and implementing COVID-19 protocols in a short amount of time and the burden of responding to fluctuations in the indicators, especially as some of our school districts encompass multiple Counties. Taking these factors into consideration, we plan to start the school year advising CDPHE's COVID-19 recommendations for "low-risk counties" for each of our three counties.

### **Communication and Collaboration with Tri-County Health Department**

As we approach the upcoming school year, TCHD will continue to work closely with our school partners to achieve the following:

- Ensure our school partners understand how to apply best practices to support a safe learning environment, as based on current CDC, CDPHE, and TCHD guidance.
- Perform surveillance to track reported COVID-19 cases associated with schools, identify suspected or confirmed outbreaks, and follow trends in illness.
- Provide support and recommendations to control and prevent further spread of disease in situations where school-based transmission is evident.
- Support schools with proper implementation of disease control measures to manage and mitigate outbreaks.
- Continue school webinars as needed to disseminate educational materials and guidance and to address school partner's questions.

TCHD is readily available to support our school partners. Our collaboration will depend on good, bilateral communication with schools. Please contact TCHD with:

- Questions or concerns regarding school illness/exclusion policies; CDPHE school guidance; implementation of mitigation and prevention measures; access to resources (e.g. vaccinations or testing); or isolation or quarantine; considerations for school closures if needed.
- Concerns over increasing COVID-19 case counts, respiratory illness, or high rates of absenteeism observed among students or staff.

Additionally, TCHD will contact our school partners regarding:

- Notification of a COVID-19 case reported among students, teachers, or staff. TCHD may request additional information pertinent to the case investigation, as noted below.
- Identification or report of a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 outbreak. TCHD will partner with schools for all outbreaks to help manage cases, identify contacts, and make informed decisions about quarantine and exclusion.

### **Communicable Disease Requirements**

COVID-19 is a reportable condition in Colorado. Schools must report cases to public health. Per State statute §25-1-122, § 25-1-506, and C.R.S. and Board of Health Rule 6 CCR 1009-1:).

- Schools are required to report any COVID-19 case they are aware of, including a positive COVID-19 test result in an asymptomatic person.
- Schools are required to report both suspected and confirmed outbreaks of COVID-19 immediately upon identification.
- Public health is authorized in state statute to conduct investigations of reportable communicable diseases, including COVID-19. We are permitted access to records and test results pertaining to these conditions, and will contact cases to conduct investigations. Public health may require isolation or quarantine of ill or exposed individuals based on these investigations.
- There is no change in mandatory isolation requirements. Students, teachers, or staff with a positive COVID-19 test are required to isolate for 10 days from illness onset date, or test date if asymptomatic. Individuals with a positive COVID test may not test out of isolation. A person identified as a probable COVID-19 case through an investigation is also required to isolate for 10 days since illness onset.

If an outbreak has been identified or if there are concerns about individual cases at a school, TCHD may:

- Have schools assist in tracking and reporting new cases associated with the outbreak (such as helping update an outbreak line list when school learns of new cases).
- Recommend additional, layered mitigation measures such as masking, serial testing, and enhanced contact tracing and quarantine, in accordance with CDPHE and CDC guidance and in consultation with school/school district officials.
- Request data such as lab results, symptom onset date, clinical signs and symptoms, exposure history at the school, epidemiological links with other potential cases, dates of in-person participation in school-associated activities (academic or extracurricular).
- Although CDPHE guidance for counties with high vaccination rates no longer requires schools to perform routine contact tracing in classrooms, TCHD's investigation team will gather exposure data from school-associated cases and may request assistance from the school to supplement our investigations. This data is necessary for TCHD to track potential transmission in the school setting and to help evaluate whether a cluster of school cases indicates an outbreak.

### **Implementing Layered Mitigation Measures to Facilitate In-person Learning**

Best practice to prioritize in-person learning involves implementing layered mitigation measures to help reduce the risk of disease spread among students, teachers, staff, and their household members. TCHD strongly recommends having these measures in place at the start of the school year:

- Anyone who is 2+ years and not fully vaccinated is ***strongly encouraged*** to wear a mask indoors. Please note, all students over the age of 2 years are required to wear face coverings on school buses, in alignment with [CDC's requirement for face masks on public transportation](#).
- Symptom screening is implemented. Students, teachers, or staff who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home and seek testing. Persons should also stay home when experiencing any other acute illness (e.g., gastrointestinal) and refer to their healthcare provider for medical care as needed.
- Proper and frequent handwashing is supported and encouraged.
- Cleaning and disinfection according to [CDC guidance](#).
- Improved ventilation according to [CDC guidance](#).

Additional measures may be necessary to control in-school transmission depending on trends in case counts, case clusters, or for outbreak management. TCHD will have in-depth discussions with school/school district leadership if evidence indicates a need for additional measures. Measures may include:

- Mandated mask wearing
- Enhanced contact tracing
- Physical distancing
- Quarantine
- Restriction of certain activities
- Serial testing

### **Vaccinations are the Leading Prevention Strategy to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19**

Vaccination is the most effective measure to curb the spread of COVID-19 in schools, homes, and in the community.

- COVID-19 vaccine is available every day throughout Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas counties.
- TCHD's [COVID-19 vaccines webpage](#) lists clinics by day of the week in a calendar format and by location in a map. Most clinics offer walk-in/no appointment required options.
- Promote the importance of vaccine in school newsletters, social media and other communications. TCHD is readily available to support your school's education efforts. Contact [COVIDvaccine@tchd.org](mailto:COVIDvaccine@tchd.org) to connect with one of our team.
- Any school or school district interested in hosting a vaccination clinic can complete CDPHE's online [Vaccination Event Request Form](#).
- Connect with TCHD at [COVIDvaccine@tchd.org](mailto:COVIDvaccine@tchd.org) or CDPHE to host a vaccine clinic.

### **Testing**

Testing can be used as part of a layered mitigation strategy to support a return to in-person learning as it enables schools to identify infected individuals and isolate them away from other students and learning environments. Testing also keeps local governments, agencies and schools informed of levels of transmission in the community, helping districts scale their response based on community conditions.

With counties currently in the low-risk category, schools may choose to only offer diagnostic testing of symptomatic students, or encourage at-home testing of symptomatic students. If risk of transmission increases significantly, schools may choose to enroll in the state testing program to begin serial testing

staff and students. Schools may also choose to implement serial testing for high-risk activities. Extracurricular activities, particularly those involving forced exhalation (e.g. band, choir, and athletic activities), should be approached cautiously. We strongly encourage vaccination for students participating in these activities. Pre-event testing is strongly encouraged for unvaccinated participants.

While the state can organize and implement testing inside schools, either through vendors or diagnostic testing, TCHD is responsible for keeping our schools informed of where testing is available and any changes in testing policy and technologies. If schools are not offering testing, school leaders are asked to direct members of their school community to [TCHD's testing webpage](#) to find a testing site that meets their needs. TCHD's testing webpage provides information on testing locations, identification requirements, hours of operation, cost, and testing type. This information is updated regularly.

For more information on testing, please contact TCHD's Community Testing Branch Director, Chris Howk, at [chowk@tchd.org](mailto:chowk@tchd.org).

**Additional Resources:**

- CDPHE's [Practical Guidance for Operationalizing CDC's School Guidance](#)
- CDPHE's [Addressing Symptoms at School](#) and [Return to Learn](#) guidance documents following a positive [COVID-19 symptom screen](#).
- CDPHE's [School and Childcare FAQs](#)
- CDC's [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- CDC's [Scientific Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs](#)
- [Colorado COVID-19 Case and Outbreak Definitions](#)
- TCHD's [Isolation Guidance](#)

As we continue to prepare for the upcoming school year, TCHD will provide additional written recommendations addressing specific situations as schools operationalize CDPHE and CDC guidance. Follow-up communications will provide information on considerations for implementation of mitigation measures and will review high risk exposures, among other things.

In addition to written communications, TCHD will hold a webinar for School Leaders on August 4, 2021 at 3:00 PM. If you have not yet registered, [please register here](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to [COVIDschools@tchd.org](mailto:COVIDschools@tchd.org). Thank you for your time and continued efforts for a safe return to in-person learning.

Thank you,



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