



Dear School Leaders,

In follow-up to our [July 26, 2021 letter](#) and [July 30, 2021 letter](#), Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) is sharing additional detail to our previous recommendations and requirements, as well as how collaboration with TCHD will look for the 2021-22 school year. As you consider the information below, please keep in mind that while we are hopeful that expanding vaccination will help reduce community transmission of Delta and future variants, we have learned to expect the unexpected with COVID-19, and guidance may change over time as circumstances warrant in order to optimize safe in-person learning. TCHD's School Team will be available throughout the school year to answer questions and provide support as needed.

Best Practices for Mitigation Measures

Schools should consult [CDPHE](#) and [CDC](#) school guidance for best practices regarding mitigation measures in the school setting. Each mitigation measure implemented reduces the risk of disease spread, and TCHD strongly encourages schools to layer multiple mitigation measures for their school community. With that, increasing rates of vaccination within our school communities is the most important measure to secure safe, in-person learning. Strong endorsement from schools appears to correlate highly with willingness of parents to get their children vaccinated, so please provide educational materials and promote vaccination of eligible students and their families to the greatest extent possible.

TCHD will recommend the enhanced mitigation measures in response to cases and outbreaks in the school setting when circumstances warrant such measures. While some measures should be understood as recommendations rather than requirements, others measures may be required. Schools must work with TCHD to control disease spread when cases are identified, depending on the setting. The implementation of required mitigation measures may be enforced through public health order in response to uncontrolled disease spread.

Masking

On July 27, 2021, the CDC, citing new evidence on increased transmissibility of the Delta variant among infected vaccinated or unvaccinated persons, recommended universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status or rates of community spread. TCHD endorsed this recommendation as a strong science-based mitigation measure to support safe in-person learning and strongly encouraged school leaders to implement universal masking policies in schools. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have endorsed this recommendation. Just this week the AAP Colorado Chapter issued a Call for Universal Masking for All Colorado Schools and Child Care Settings. We urge you to continue to convey this as strong recommendation to your families, and ask that your teachers and staff amplify this message in school-based settings.

TCHD is closely monitoring community conditions to inform our decision-making regarding guidance, recommendations and public health order requirements. Changes in case rates, hospitalizations and hospital capacity, rates of vaccination, evolution of COVID-19 variants, and recommendations from expert groups will influence our recommendations and requirements. Additionally, low rates of masking, limited implementation of best practice mitigation measures, or school-based outbreaks in schools will also impact recommendations and requirements.

Responding to Cases and Outbreaks

Please see TCHD's [Responding to Cases and Outbreaks in the School Setting](#) guidance document for detailed information on response responsibilities when single cases, clusters of cases, and outbreaks are identified in the school setting. In addition to providing information on expectations for schools, this document outlines when school can expect to hear from and work with TCHD on response activities. Template communications, important definitions, and links to resources will be added to this resource and distributed in the coming days.

Higher Risk Exposures

Per [CDPHE School Guidance](#), contact tracing and quarantine is required when a COVID-19 case occurs in a “higher risk” school setting. Most routine classroom settings in schools **are not considered high risk**, especially when universal masking is observed.

In the spirit of reducing quarantines resulting from school exposure as much as possible and given the current epidemiologic situation, at this time TCHD does not consider exposures during routine school activities to be “higher-risk” and quarantine is not recommended in those settings. Routine school activities are defined as those that occur during school day hours and are primarily curriculum-based. Routine school activities include the classroom setting, routine physical education classes, routine music classes, assemblies and lunchroom meals. Routine school activities exclude extracurricular activities (e.g. athletic practices and games; band, chorus, and other performing art performances outside of curriculum-based classes; and fieldtrips).

Schools must be prepared to conduct contact tracing and implement quarantine when cases are identified in higher-risk settings. TCHD is available to provide assistance with exposure assessments as needed. Unvaccinated close contacts should quarantine and get tested around 5 days after exposure. Vaccinated close contacts should wear a mask and be tested 3-5 days after an exposure.

Quarantine of individuals exposed outside of the school setting:

Quarantine is a preventive measure used when someone is exposed to another person with a contagious disease and should avoid exposing others during a time when illness could develop. Given the disruptive impact of quarantines on in-person learning during the previous school year, persons exposed to someone with COVID-19 in a *routine classroom setting* are not required to quarantine in counties with high rates of vaccination, a practice that we presently plan to follow for our 3 counties.

However, students, teachers, and staff who are in close contact to a person with COVID-19 *outside* of the routine classroom setting should quarantine. Examples may include being household contacts of a case, or other situations when a school member is within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more *outside* of the school setting. This quarantine period should be counted from the last day of exposure to the person with COVID-19. Contacts identified outside of the school setting who have been asked to quarantine must stay home and be excluded from school and all school related activities.

As a reminder, isolation is required when someone has COVID-19. All individuals with COVID-19 must observe a 10-day in-home isolation. For more detailed information, please see TCHD's [isolation and quarantine guidance](#).

Respiratory illness in the school setting:

COVID-19 shares many similar symptoms with other common respiratory illnesses including flu and RSV. Symptom screening alone is often difficult to differentiate between different illnesses therefore testing is recommended in order to guide appropriate disease response. Schools should consult and follow [CDPHE's symptom screening guidance](#) to identify ill students and staff and direct them to testing as appropriate.

Requirements

In summary, while most information and guidance provided to school leaders should be understood as strong science-based recommendations rather than requirements, the following are currently the measures that schools must implement:

- **Isolation.** All students, staff and visitors testing positive for COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days and be prohibited from in-person participation in school and school related activities.
- **Reporting cases and outbreaks.** Cases and outbreaks within the school setting must be reported to TCHD and school leaders must cooperate in communicable disease investigation activities.
- **Mask wearing on school buses as public transportation.** All individuals on school transportation, including private school transportation, must wear a mask as required by CDC's [Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs](#).
- **Quarantine of individuals exposed during high-risk activities.** As described above, certain activities pose a higher risk of disease transmission. As such, schools must implement contact tracing and quarantine for individuals exposed during these activities.

As noted above, requirements may change over time depending on the community conditions that we will be following closely.

Next Steps

TCHD held our School Leader Webinar on Wednesday, August 4, 2021. TCHD's School Team presented the latest guidance, walked through practical examples, and took questions from participants. If you were not able to participate, a recording of the webinar can be found on TCHD's [School Support page](#).

TCHD will hold a follow-up Webinar for School Leaders on **August 18, 2021 at 3:00pm**. TCHD's School Team will present the latest guidance, walk through additional examples, and take questions from participants. Please [register for this webinar here](#).

Additional communications, guidance documents, and webinars, will be prepared by TCHD as needed. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out at covidschools@tchd.org.

Thank you,



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