

**Montgomery County Office of Public Health**  
**Recommendation 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	Recommendations	
<p><b>Promotion of COVID-19 Vaccination</b></p>	<p>Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students as well as teachers, staff, and household members is one of the most critical strategies to help schools safely maintain full operations.</p> <p>Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. People who are up to date with vaccinations against COVID-19 are at low risk of symptomatic or severe infection. A <a href="#">growing body of evidence</a> suggests that people who are up to date with vaccination against COVID-19 are less likely to have a symptomatic infection or transmit COVID-19 to others than people who are not up to date with vaccination. In most settings, people who are up to date with vaccination can safely maintain activities they did before the pandemic, except where prevention measures are required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.</p> <p>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>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>Because of the importance of in-person learning, schools where not everyone is up to date with vaccination should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their structures, but should not exclude students from in-person learning if the minimum distancing recommendations is not possible in some situations.</p>	

	<p>Schools where not everyone is up to date with vaccination should implement physical distancing to the extent possible. Maintaining at least 3 feet of physical distancing between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by people who are not up to date with vaccination will reduce risk of transmission (or among all people during times of substantial and high school district community level of transmission). A distance of 6ft is recommended between students and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff, who are not up to date with vaccination.</p> <p>When it is not possible to maintain a physical distancing at least 3 feet, it is especially important to layer multiple prevention strategies, such as masking, testing, cohorting, improving ventilation, handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes, staying home when sick with symptoms consistent with an infectious illness including COVID-19, and regular cleaning to help reduce transmission risk.</p> <p>Co-horting: Co-horting means keeping people together in small groups and having each group stay together throughout an entire day. Co-horting 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 (for example, among groups of young children and in areas of moderate, substantial and high transmission levels).</p>
<p><b>Consistent and Correct Mask Usage</b>  <a href="#"><i>Improve How Your Mask Protects You</i></a></p>	<p>COVID-19 is transmitted predominantly by inhalation of respiratory droplets generated when people cough, sneeze, sing, talk, or breathe. Masks are primarily intended to reduce the emission of virus-laden droplets (“source control”), which is especially relevant for asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic infected wearers who feel well and may be unaware of their infectiousness to others, and who are estimated to account for more than 50% of transmissions.<sup>1,2</sup> Masks also help reduce inhalation of these droplets by the wearer.</p> <p>MCOPH encourages that schools/districts adopt as part of their health and safety plan masking requirements aligned with current <a href="#">CDC guidelines</a>. As community-level transmission changes, schools/districts may consider adopting masking requirements based on community-level/school district-level transmission (see School District Level of Community Transmission chart).</p> <p><u>Mask usage on transportation:</u> MCOPH follows the CDC/Health and Human Services (HHS) order for wearing of face masks while on conveyances requires individuals to wear masks while traveling on both public and private school transportation. <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html</a></p> <p><u>Changes in mask usage:</u> Masking usage outlined below are based on school district level of community transmission. Changes in mask usage should be made based on 2 consecutive weeks of increased or decreased school district level of community transmission.</p> <p>*Individuals may obtain an exemption to masking requirements based on <a href="#">CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools</a>.</p>

<b>School District Level of Community Transmission</b>				
<b>Low</b> 0-9.9 cases per 100,000 and <5% positivity		<b>Moderate</b> 10-49.9 cases per 100,000 or 5-7% positivity	<b>Substantial</b> 50-99.9 cases per 100,000 or 8-9.9% positivity	<b>High</b> 100 to > 100 cases per 100,000 or >10% positivity
<p><b>Indoors:</b> Masking is optional for all individuals regardless of vaccination status while indoors.</p> <p><b>Outdoors:</b> Masking is optional while outdoors.</p>		<p><b>Indoors:</b> Masking for fully vaccinated individuals optional while indoors. Masking for individuals who are not fully-vaccinated is recommended while indoors.</p> <p><b>Outdoors:</b> Masking for all individuals is optional while outdoors. However, individuals who are not fully vaccinated are recommended to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.</p>	<p><b>Indoors:</b> Masking for all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, except while eating, drinking, and during mask breaks.*</p> <p><b>Outdoors:</b> Masking for all individuals is optional while outdoors. However, individuals who are not fully vaccinated are recommended to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.</p>	<p><b>Universal Masking Policy:</b> Masking for all individuals indoors and outdoors, regardless of vaccination status, except while eating, drinking, and during mask breaks.*</p>
<p><b>COVID-19 Screening</b> <a href="#"><u>Project ACT-IT</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Operation E.T.</u></a></p>		<p><i>Effective Monday January 10, 2022, MCOPH recommends discontinuing required weekly assurance testing of asymptomatic of staff and students. If resources allow, offer voluntary participation in weekly assurance testing for children with special health care needs and those participating in high risk activities including sports, band and chorus.</i></p> <p>Screening 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><a href="#"><u>Youth Sports and COVID-19: Understand the Risk</u></a></p>	<p>Schools may consider testing a random sample of at least 10% of students or may conduct <a href="#"><u>pooled testing</u></a> for COVID-19. Random sampling can reduce costs and eliminate bias in the testing design but may require more logistics and planning. <a href="#"><u>Pooled testing</u></a> increases the number of people who can be tested at once and reduces testing resources used. Pooled testing works best when the number of positives is expected to be very low. Screening testing recommended below is based on school district level of community transmissions. Changes in screening should be made based on 2 consecutive weeks of increased or decreased school district level of community transmission.</p>				
<p><b>School District Level of Community Transmission</b></p>					
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Low</b> 0-9.9 cases per 100,000 and &lt;5% positivity</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Moderate</b> 10-49.9 cases per 100,000 or 5-7% positivity</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Substantial</b> 50-99.9 cases per 100,000 or 8-9.9% positivity</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>High</b> 100 to &gt; 100 cases per 100,000 or &gt;10% positivity</p>
<p>No asymptomatic assurance screening recommended</p>		<p>No asymptomatic assurance screening recommended</p>		<p><b>High Risk sports/activities</b> Once a week assurance testing of students regardless of vaccination statuses</p> <p><b>Special Health Care Needs</b> Once a week assurance testing of students regardless of vaccination statuses</p>	<p><b>High Risk sports/activities</b> Once a week assurance testing of students regardless of vaccination statuses</p> <p><b>Special Health Care Needs</b> Once a week assurance testing of students regardless of vaccination statuses</p>
<p><b>Mask to Stay</b></p>	<p>Mask to Stay (MTS) allows staff and students who are exposed to COVID-19 in school or in the community, and who are asymptomatic to continue to attend school with required mask-wearing at all times when around other people for ten days after the date of exposure. See <a href="#"><u>MCOPH Mask to Stay Guidance</u></a>.</p>				
<p><b>Test to Stay</b></p>	<p>Test to Stay (TTS) is a tool in a layered COVID-19 prevention strategy that allows individuals who are identified as a close contact to a case of COVID-19 and who remain asymptomatic to continue to attend school and participate in extra-curricular activities in a modified quarantine while committing to a testing cadence. See <a href="#"><u>MCOPH Test to Stay Guidance</u></a>.</p>				
<p><b>Ventilation</b></p>	<p>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><b>Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette</b></p>	<p>Practice handwashing and respiratory etiquette to keep from getting and spreading infectious illnesses including COVID-19.</p>				

	<p>Encourage handwashing strategies which include 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. Handwashing strategies should be encouraged after going to the bathroom, before eating, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, and after touching your face.</p> <p>Encourage respiratory etiquette which includes covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, use tissues and throw them away, and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer every time you touch your mouth or nose.</p>
<p><b>Cleaning and Disinfection</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>CDC Cleaning and Disinfection EPA-Registered Products</u></a></p>	<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. 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: substantial or high level of transmission of COVID-19 in your school community, and 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>
<p><b>Contact Tracing</b></p>	<p>Contact Tracing is a mechanism for determining contacts who are subject to quarantine. For guidance for contact tracing see <a href="#"><u>MCOPH’s Guidance for Prioritizing Contact Tracing.</u></a></p>
<p><b>Isolation and Quarantine</b></p>	<p>Isolation and Quarantine is required in accordance with Montgomery County Public Health Code, Chapter 3, Communicable and Non-communicable Diseases. Recommendations for isolation, quarantine and testing is provided and updated on <a href="#"><u>MCOPH School Exclusion Recommendations.</u></a></p> <p>Reflected in the <a href="#"><u>MCOPH School Exclusion Recommendations</u></a>, MCOPH adopted the close contact exception as outlined by CDC for student-to-student COVID-19 exposure within the indoor classrooms or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed. If both the COVID-19 positive student and an unvaccinated student who is exposed were <i>both</i> wearing masks <i>and</i> practicing physical distancing of at least 3 ft. or more, the exposed student WILL NOT be identified as a close contact and WILL NOT need to quarantine. Close contact exemptions were adopted by CDC on July 9, 2021, and is subject to change based on CDC/PADOH guidance and Montgomery County or School District level of community transmission. Pre-K through grade 12 schools can contact MCOPH at <a href="mailto:MCSchoolsCOVID19@montcopa.org"><u>MCSchoolsCOVID19@montcopa.org</u></a> or 610-278-6211.</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. [Pennsylvania Department of Education, Message to School Communities, July 2021 Messages, July 6, 2021](#)
2. [Pennsylvania Department of Education, ARP ESSER Health and Safety Plan: Guidance, Template, and Resources, Updated June 4, 2021](#)
3. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools, Updated January 6, 2022 2021](#)
4. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Your Guide to Masks, Updated June 29, 2021](#)
5. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Order: Wearing of face masks while on conveyances and at transportation hubs, Updated June 10, 2021](#)