Guidance for TK-12 Schools for School Year 2021-2022

Last updated March 11, 2022

This guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) for local use. It will be posted at https://sfcdcp.org/school.

Summary of changes since 2/23/2022

- Updated indoor masking policy where applicable. Indoor masking requirement has changed to a strong recommendation, regardless of vaccination status, for both students and staff.
- Clarification that masking is now strongly recommended on school buses or vans, but still required on public transportation.
- Testing requirement for unvaccinated participants during higher-risk, indoor activities with heavy breathing or exertion has been changed to a strong recommendation for testing of all participants of these activities, if masks are not worn.

Changes highlighted in green.

AUDIENCE: Public, private, and parochial TK-12 schools in San Francisco. Transitional kindergarten (TK) programs that are not part of an elementary school should refer to SFDPH’s Guidance for Programs for Children and Youth.

PURPOSE: To help TK-12 schools understand health and safety practices needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for in-person instruction.

BACKGROUND: Given the important health and education benefits of in-person learning and the knowledge gained since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic, our priority must be to ensure continued safe in-person learning for all students in San Francisco. By layering effective prevention strategies, schools can reduce the risk of COVID-19 and provide in-person instruction safely for staff and students. These recommendations are based on the science available at this time. They are subject to change as new knowledge emerges, local transmission changes, or as COVID-19 vaccination rates change.
Key Messages

- **Vaccination and boosters of staff, eligible students, and household members for COVID-19 is one of the most effective ways to decrease the risk of COVID-19 in schools.** Up-to-date vaccinated adults and eligible students also provide protection to younger children who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

- **In-person attendance is crucial** to students’ physical and mental health as well as their learning, Measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 must consider and prioritize students’ access to safe and full in-person instruction, keeping them in school as much as possible and limiting unnecessary missed days at school.

Procedures and Protocols

Establish COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

- **Designate a COVID-19 staff or liaison** to be the single point of contact at each site for questions, concerns, or exposures. This person will also serve as a liaison to SFDPH.

- **Create a plan** describing what your school will do to follow the requirements in this guidance and any relevant Health Directives or Orders, including Health Directive No. 2020-33, “Required Best Practices for Schools”, at https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/coronavirus-health-directives.asp
  - Update your plan regularly to reflect changes in COVID-19 guidance and local transmission.
  - **Share your plan** on your website and with staff, families, and other members of your community.

- **Establish written protocols** for what your school will do if someone at school is exposed to COVID-19, has symptoms of COVID-19, and/or tests positive for COVID-19.


- Do not exclude children and youth because of medical conditions that may increase their risk of severe COVID-19. Let the child’s medical team and family decide if it’s safe for them to attend.

Recommended Signs.

Programs may post the following signs, available here in different sizes and colors:

- Post at all public entrances: [Best practices for COVID-19 prevention](https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19)

- Post in staff break rooms and other staff areas: [Get Vaccinated, SF!](https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19)

Signs are available in different sizes and colors at sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19. The toolkit also has a variety of signs, posters, and fact sheets on COVID-19.
Strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19

Promote COVID-19 vaccination.

- Encourage COVID-19 vaccination for staff, volunteers, students old enough to be vaccinated, and family members.
- Limit non-essential visitors who are not fully vaccinated, including volunteers and activities involving external groups, as recommended by CDPH.

Wear face masks indoors.

*Face masks can keep infection from spreading, by trapping respiratory droplets and aerosols before they can travel through the air and help prevent someone from getting infected. They are an essential prevention strategy in indoor spaces.*

For this guidance, **face masks** includes cloth face coverings that cover the mouth and nose.

- Face masks are strongly recommended indoors for everyone 24 months and older, regardless of vaccination status or symptom status. They are especially recommended when transmission risk is high.
- Face masks are still required when traveling on public transportation or in transit stations.
- Masks should be well-fitted and cover the mouth and nose. Scarves and other loose face coverings are not recommended.
- No one can be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into school, unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard (for example, water sports).
- Keep a supply of face masks for people who forget to bring their own.
- Face masks are not required outdoors as the risk of transmission is low in most outdoor settings. They may be considered when people are stationary and in crowded situations like on the sidelines of a game or spectators in the stands.

Who should not wear face masks.

- Children under 24 months old must not wear face masks, due to the risk of suffocation.
- People who are unconscious, asleep, or unable to remove a face mask independently.

For more information on face masks, see CDPH Face Mask guidance, CDPH TK-12 guidance, CDPH Schools Questions and Answers, and San Francisco Health Order C19-07.
Testing.

Testing is most useful when people are more likely to be infected, for example, after close contact to someone with COVID-19, with higher-risk activities like indoor sports, and when community levels of COVID-19 are high. Testing is less useful when the chance of infection is low, for example, for people who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19, with low-risk activities like classroom instruction, and when community levels of COVID-19 are low.

- **SFDPH requires** regular once weekly testing of:
  - On-site school personnel who are **not vaccinated** for COVID-19, including volunteers, interns, and student teachers.
  - Testing must be at least once weekly with PCR, other nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), or an antigen test.
  - If personnel decline testing, the school must not allow them on campus.
  - Unvaccinated personnel must either sign a release of information for test results to be shared with the school or commit to notifying the school within 1 hour of a positive or inconclusive result, and within 24 hours of a negative result.
  - Unvaccinated individuals who have a documented COVID-19 infection (for example either with a doctor’s note or a confirmed test) in the previous 90 days may be exempted from testing for 90 days from the date of infection. They should resume screening testing after 90 days.

- Schools must keep a log of all test results. For tests not done by the school, verify results (i.e., by viewing an electronic or paper copy of the negative result or note from the test site or clinic, with the person’s name and date tested).

- **SFDPH strongly recommends** testing for the following groups:
  - People with symptoms of COVID-19 or close contact to COVID-19, even if they have been vaccinated for COVID-19.
  - Weekly testing for all K-12 students who participate in indoor activities that are higher-risk for transmission due to heavy breathing or exertion (like sports or playing wind instruments) if masks are not worn, regardless of vaccination status. Children who have had COVID-19 in the last 90 days are excluded from this recommendation. This recommendation applies to all activities that are organized or supervised by a school or take place at a school site. For more information, see [CDPH K-12 Schools Guidance](https://sfcdc.org/school).

- **SFDPH does not recommend** routine testing of the following groups:
  - Students without COVID-19 symptoms or known exposures who do not participate in higher-risk activities.
  - Vaccinated staff without COVID-19 symptoms or known exposures.
  - Staff and students who had COVID-19 in the last 3 months, confirmed by a test, who do not have symptoms.

**Improve ventilation and use outdoor spaces.**

*Increasing indoor air circulation lowers the risk of infection by “diluting” any infectious respiratory droplets with outdoor air. Being outside is even lower risk.*
Outdoor spaces

- Do as many activities outside as possible, especially snacks/meals and exercise.
- To be considered an outdoor space, structures should meet SFDPH ventilation guidelines for outdoor structures, at https://www.sfdph.org/dph/COVID-19/Outdoor-Structures.asp.

Indoor spaces

*Good ventilation decreases the number of respiratory droplets in the air by replacing indoor air with fresh, uncontaminated air and/or filtering infectious droplets out of the air. It is another important measure to prevent COVID-19 transmission indoors.*

During wildfires or other times when air quality is poor, prioritize maintaining healthy air quality indoors. Your school can stay open even if you need to close your windows or decrease outdoor air intake by your ventilation system during these times. Continue other precautions, especially wearing face masks. Portable air cleaners (HEPA filters) can be helpful.

Review CDPH Ventilation Guidance. General recommendations include:

- Open windows to increase natural ventilation with outdoor air when health and safety allow. When possible, consider also leaving room doors slightly open to promote flow of outdoor air through the indoor space.
- If open windows pose a risk of falls for children, use window locks to keep windows from opening more than 4 inches, or other safety devices to prevent falls.
- Do not prop or wedge open fire doors. Continue to follow fire and building safety requirements.
- If your building has an HVAC system (also called mechanical ventilation, forced air, or central air):
  - Have your HVAC system checked by a professional to make sure that it is working properly.
  - Open outdoor air dampers and close recirculation dampers (“economizers”). This will maximize the amount of outdoor air that the HVAC system takes in and minimize the amount of indoor air that is recirculated.
  - If you can use higher-efficiency air filters without reducing airflow or damaging your HVAC system, use air filters rated MERV13 or better.
  - Disable “demand-control ventilation controls” so fans keep running even when a room doesn’t need to be heated or cooled.
  - If your HVAC system has a timer, set it to run at least 1-2 hours before the building opens until 2-3 hours after everyone has left the building, including custodial staff.
- If your school uses fans, adjust the direction of fans to so that air does not blow from one person’s space to another’s space.
- Consider portable air cleaners (“HEPA filters”).

For more information, see:


Stay home when sick.

*Asking people about symptoms after they arrive is not very effective in keeping COVID-19 out of programs. It is more important to tell people to stay home if they are sick.*
Make sure that staff, volunteers, students, and families know the symptoms of COVID-19. Tell people to stay home if they have symptoms.

- Give a list of COVID-19 symptoms to staff, volunteers, students, and families. Make sure they know to stay home if they have symptoms. **Schools do not have to confirm that people have reviewed the list each day.**
  
  SFDPH has created a sample handout for families, [For Parents and Guardians: COVID-19 Symptom and Exposure Check](https://sfcdcp.org/school), at sfcdcp.org/school

- Encourage family members of students and staff to get tested promptly if they have symptoms of COVID-19. This will lower the risk of infection spreading to people in your school.

- SFDPH does not recommend temperature checks.


**Hand hygiene: Follow pre-COVID protocols.**

- Teach and reinforce the importance of washing hands, avoiding contact with one’s eyes, nose, and mouth, and covering coughs and sneezes among students and staff.

- Promote hand washing throughout the day, especially before and after eating, after using the toilet, and after handling garbage, or removing gloves.

- Make sure that people have supplies to clean their hands, including soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent ethyl alcohol for staff and children who can safely use hand sanitizer.

**Cleaning and disinfection:** Routine disinfection to prevent COVID-19 is no longer recommended for schools. **Surfaces are not a significant route of transmission.**

- Cleaning once a day is usually enough to remove potential virus that may be on surfaces.

- Paper-based materials like books and magazines do not need cleaning between uses.

- Outdoor playgrounds do not need cleaning and disinfection between groups.

- Additional disinfection is recommended only if a person with COVID-19 was present within the last 24 hours; clean AND disinfect spaces occupied by that person during that time.


**Cohorting is not required.**

*A cohort is a small, stable group with the same staff and children each day. Keeping people in cohorts lowers their exposure risk by limiting the number of people they interact with. It is less important when community transmission is low.*

SFDPH does not recommend cohorting if it will limit full enrollment for in-person learning. Schools should prioritize full enrollment over strict cohorting.
Physical distancing is not required.

Physical distancing decreases the risk of COVID-19 from respiratory droplets. It is less important in settings where people wear face masks, vaccination rates are high, and spread of COVID-19 is low.

- **Physical distancing is no longer required.** Because of the importance of in-person learning, CDC, CDPH, and SFDPH do not recommend physical distancing if it will limit full enrollment.

**Sports, dance, wind instruments, singing, and related activities**

*Sports, dance, and activities involving singing, chanting, shouting, and playing wind instruments are higher risk for COVID-19 because people breathe more air and breathe out more forcefully when doing these activities. The risk is much higher indoors than outdoors, and higher without face masks.*

- These activities are allowed outdoors without face masks.
- As for other school activities, face masks are strongly recommended to be worn indoors as practicable.

**Recommended testing for higher risk indoor activities**

- It is strongly recommended that individuals who participate in indoor activities that are higher-risk for transmission due to heavy breathing or exertion undergo regular COVID-19 testing if masks are not worn, unless they had COVID-19 in the past 90 days (See Testing).

**Reporting and notification of COVID-19 cases.**

Schools, programs, and event organizers must:

1. Inform SFDPH of positive tests within 24 hours, whether detected during on-site testing or communicated to the team or organizer.
2. Identify and notify individuals with close contact to a COVID-19 case, including other teams or referees.
3. If informed by another team of a positive case, identify, and notify close contacts on the team, and notify SFDPH of the exposure at cases.schoo$schools@sfdph.org$.
4. Leagues and tournaments/multi-team events should establish procedures for notifying other teams and referees of a positive COVID-19 case that occurs during competition.

**Additional steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 with higher-risk activities.**

**Recommend indoor masking.**

- Encourage masking for volunteers and spectators as well as participants and staff.
- Masks are strongly recommended to be worn indoors for indoor competition and performances, in accordance with the CDPH Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings and San Francisco Health Orders.
- Masks are not required outdoors as the risk of transmission is low in most outdoor settings. Masking outdoors may be considered when people are stationary and distancing is not possible, for example, for athletes on the sidelines during games or spectators in the stands.
Strongly encourage or require COVID-19 up-to-date vaccination.

*COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for all participants who are old enough to be eligible for vaccination, as well as coaches, staff and volunteers.*

*Having everyone in your league up to date on vaccination will greatly decrease the risk of transmission of the virus among teammates and between teams, and will protect teams against severe illness, hospitalization, and death. It will also decrease disruption in team activities, since vaccinated individuals are not required to quarantine if they are close contacts to a case of COVID-19.*

- Leagues, teams, and tournaments/events are encouraged to require that all eligible participants and personnel be up to date on vaccination for COVID-19.
- When transmission is high, consider cancelling high-risk sports and extracurricular activities unless all participants are up to date on vaccination, as recommended by [CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools.html).

Move higher-risk activities outdoors, when practical.

- Exercise, physical conditioning, and training, including practices and games.
- Cheer, stunt, drill team, etc.
- Wind instruments.
- Choir, or any singing.
- Drama and dance.

Prevent spread of COVID-19 off the field.

- Remind participants and families that COVID-19 often spreads off-the-field, especially in situations when groups let their guard down and eat or socialize together (post-game parties, locker rooms, carpools).
- Locker rooms are high-risk because they are often crowded and poorly ventilated.
  - Have players arrive dressed to play as much as possible.
  - Use locker rooms only to change or use the restroom. Don't use the locker room for coaching or pregame, halftime or postgame talks.
  - Avoid having different teams use a locker room at the same time.
  - Encourage/Recommend mask use in locker rooms.

Travel.

- When traveling overnight, team members not from the same household should sleep in separate rooms or in consistent groups when feasible. Encourage wearing masks whenever visiting other members’ hotel rooms.
- Socializing with other teams is strongly discouraged.
- Teams that travel out-of-state or outside the Bay Area are encouraged to follow CDC recommendations for quarantine after travel.
Specific Situations

Transportation.

*Since vehicles are small, enclosed spaces that do not allow physical distancing, they are higher risk of COVID-19 transmission. Biking and walking are lower risk than shared vehicles.*

- **Carpools and shared rides**
  - Tell staff and families to try to carpool with the same stable group of people.
  - Open windows. Turn the fan on high, set to outdoor air.
  - Treat the vehicle as an indoor space: wearing masks is strongly recommended.

- **School Buses and Vans**
  - Face masks are strongly recommended for everyone riding school buses, including drivers. School bus drivers should carry a supply of face coverings in case a student forgets theirs.
  - Maximize space between people from different households who have not been vaccinated for COVID-19.
  - Keep vehicle windows open when weather and safety permit.
  - Turn the fan on high, set to outdoor air.
  - If more than one vehicle is used, for example, for a sports team, have the same people ride together each time, and try to assign groups that already interact with each other to the same vehicle (ex. varsity vs JV, offense vs defense).
  - Disinfection for COVID-19 not needed unless someone with COVID-19 has used the bus within the last 24 hours.
  - You do not have to ask riders about symptoms and exposures before they board.

- **Walking School Buses**
  - Prioritize pedestrian safety.
  - Keep a record of staff and students on the walking school bus each day.
  - Outdoor equipment such as walking ropes do not need additional cleaning. Instead, have children and staff wash or sanitize their hands before touching the equipment.

- **Public transit**
  - Everyone must wear face masks while riding public transit or in transit stations (train stations, subway stations), even if they are vaccinated.

Meals and snacks.

- Eat outdoors when space and weather allow.
- Meals do not need to be individually plated or bagged.
- For food service such as cafeterias, clean frequently touched surfaces. Surfaces that come in contact with food should be washed, rinsed, and sanitized before and after meals.
Students receiving special services.

- Do not exclude students because of medical conditions that may increase their risk of severe COVID-19. Let the student’s medical team and family decide if it’s safe for them to attend.
- Do not limit access to essential staff that are not school employees, such as direct service providers, occupational therapists or physical therapists. Schools can ensure compliance with school visitor policies.
- Provide accommodations and related services for special education, learning disabilities and medical conditions.
- Additional accommodations may be needed for students to safely attend class. For example, students may need additional supervision and support around face masks or handwashing.
- When students are unable to attend school due to COVID-19 infection or exposure, consider remote video sessions for therapy.

Frequently Asked Questions: What’s allowed

- Parents and caregivers may enter the building for pick-up and drop-off, even if they are not vaccinated for COVID-19.
- Therapists who are not employees but provide direct services to children onsite, such as ABA providers, occupational therapists, and physical therapists should be allowed to provide services. Providers should also be allowed on-site for vision, hearing, and dental screening.
- Festivals, performances, and other events that involve families; tours; and open houses are allowed. Keep a log of all persons who attend. This will be helpful if someone at an event, tour or open house later tests positive for COVID-19.
- Drinking fountains can be used.
- Students can share toys, computers, books, games, play areas, and area rugs.
- All restrictions on field trips have been removed. You can go on field trips to outdoor or indoor destinations. You may use shared vehicles or public transportation following the guidance outlined in this document. Students, staff and volunteers are strongly encouraged to wear masks indoors and in shared vehicles while on field trips. Keep in mind that masks are still required on public transportation.
- You may resume fire drills.
- You may hold large events like assemblies and dances as long as they follow city guidelines. If hosting large events, please follow CDPH recommendations for how to minimize risk of transmission; for example, by requiring vaccinations for all eligible attendees, holding events outdoors whenever possible, making a plan for how to identify close contacts, and so on.
What to do when someone has COVID-19 symptoms, infection or exposure

When staff or students become sick at school.

- If rapid antigen testing is available on-site, test the staff or student:
  - If the test is negative, the staff or student may remain at school if they feel well enough. A PCR/NAAT is not needed to confirm the result.
  - If the test is positive, follow the instructions in the Guide to COVID-19 Infections, Symptoms and Exposures at Schools and Programs for Children.
- If rapid antigen testing is not available at school:
  - Staff must inform their supervisor and leave work as soon as they can.
  - Send sick students home. Keep students who are waiting to be picked up in a designated isolation space. Students must be wearing masks while they are waiting to be picked up.

When someone reports a positive test, symptoms, or exposure to COVID-19.

- See the Guide to COVID-19 Infections, Symptoms and Exposures at Schools and Programs for Children for what to do if someone at school tests positive for COVID-19, has symptoms of COVID-19, or has close contact to someone with COVID-19.
- Schools must report COVID-19 cases to SFDPH at cases.schools@sfdph.org, per AB 86 (2021) and California Code Title 17, section 2500, schools. SFDPH staff will work with schools on case management and provide input on next steps, including isolation, quarantine, and outbreak management.

Returning to school after COVID-19 symptoms, exposure, or a positive test.

Refer to the Guide to Isolation and Quarantine for Schools and Programs for Children and COVID-19 Schools & Childcare Decision Tree.

Resources

San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)
- SFDPH Schools and Childcare Hub for COVID-19 consultation and guidance (628) 217-7499 or cases.schools@sfdph.org
- COVID-19 guidance for the public, including employers https://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19
- COVID-19 guidance for schools at https://sfcdcp.org/school
  - “Guide to COVID-19 Infections, Symptoms and Exposures at Schools and Programs for Children”
  - “Parent Handout: Symptom and Exposure Check/Returning to School after Symptoms”
  - COVID-19 Schools & Childcare Decision Tree
California Department of Public Health (CDPH).

- State of California Safe Schools for All Hub
  [https://schools.covid19.ca.gov/](https://schools.covid19.ca.gov/)

- COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools, 2021-22 School Year
  [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/K-12-Guidance-2021-22-School-Year.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/K-12-Guidance-2021-22-School-Year.aspx)

- K-12 Schools Guidance FAQ.
  [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Schools-FAQ.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Schools-FAQ.aspx)

- K-12 School-Based COVID-19 Testing Strategies for School Year 2021-22

- Evidence Summary: TK-6 Schools and COVID-19 Transmission
  [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Safe-Schools-for-All-Plan-Science.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Safe-Schools-for-All-Plan-Science.aspx)

- Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings
  [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools

- Schools and Child Care Programs