Reopening TK-12 Schools for In-Person, On-Site Instruction:  
Interim Guidance for School Year 2020-2021

March 21, 2021

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

Summary of Changes since the 3/12/2021 Version

Major revisions are highlighted throughout the document in blue color.

- Recommendations updated to align with CDPH guidance issued 3/20/2021.
- Student seats should be at least 3 feet apart, and do not need to face the same direction.
- Plexiglass barriers or other partitions no longer routinely recommended, regardless of the distance between student seats.
- Clarification on student movement and activity in the classroom.
- Students may participate in up to 2 extracurricular cohorts.
- Sports guidance has been updated.
- Outdoor singing and wind instruments are allowed with face masks and instrument covers.
- Outdoor field trips are allowed if no shared vehicles or public transportation are used.

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 guidance for childcares.

PURPOSE: To help TK-12 schools understand health and safety practices needed for in-person instruction.

BACKGROUND: Since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic, our understanding of COVID-19 has increased tremendously. We now know that precautions such as universal face coverings and cohorting effectively decrease the risk of COVID-19 transmission. By coordinating and layering effective interventions, schools can reduce the risk of COVID-19 enough to reopen safely for staff and students.

The recommendations below are based on the best science available at this time and the current degree of COVID-19 transmission in San Francisco. They are subject to change as new knowledge emerges and local community transmission changes.
Key messages for schools

- **Address staff-to-staff transmission and staff as sources of infection.** Several studies have shown that staff are significantly more likely to spread COVID-19 infection in school settings than students.
  
  - **Minimize the number of staff eating together in indoor break rooms.** Eating together in break rooms is a common way that staff are exposed to COVID-19 in work settings.

Preventing person-to-person transmission via respiratory droplets is more important than cleaning and disinfection. Face masks, physical distancing, and indoor ventilation are most important in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person in the air through virus-containing respiratory droplets. These droplets enter the air when a person with COVID-19 breathes, especially when they talk, sing, cough, sneeze or exercise. In poorly ventilated indoor spaces, smaller droplets can float in the air and travel more than 6 feet. The virus that causes COVID-19 must enter a person’s eyes, nose or mouth to infect them.
COVID-19 can also spread if a person touches their eyes, nose or mouth after touching a contaminated surface (also known as a fomite), but this is less common.

- **Exposure risk lies along a continuum.** A rule of thumb is that a person must spend a total of 15 minutes in 24 hours within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 to be at risk of infection.
  - Spending less time together is safer than more time; being further apart is better than being closer together.
  - Smaller groups are safer than larger ones, outdoor settings are safer than indoor ones.
  - More people using face masks is safer than fewer people using face masks.
  - Activities that produce fewer respiratory droplets are safer than those that produce many droplets (silence < quiet talking < loud talking < singing).

### Prepare for reopening

#### Eligibility to reopen under the CDPH Reopening Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School sites that have not reopened</th>
<th>Red, Orange and Yellow Tiers Purple Tier when adjusted case rate ≤ 25</th>
<th>Purple Tier with adjusted case rate &gt;25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All schools whose applications have been approved by SFDPH may reopen when the county’s adjusted case rate is 25 of lower.</td>
<td>No schools may reopen. School sites may offer or expand targeted specialized support and limited instruction for small cohorts of students (i.e. “Learning Hubs” or Special Day Classes for special education students).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- To be considered to have “reopened” for in-person instruction for purposes of the chart above, the specific school site or location must have offered ALL students in at least 1 grade the option to attend in-person, and begun in-person instruction to at least some of those students.

- Reopening applies to a school site, not for an entire school or LEA. For example, if a school has one campus for grades K-2 and another for grades 3-5, each site is considered separately when looking at eligibility to reopen.

- If school is approved to reopen, and the county’s case rate increases above 25, the school may still reopen within 3 weeks. For details, see [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19-K12-Schools-InPerson-Instruction.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19-K12-Schools-InPerson-Instruction.aspx)

- If a school was temporarily closed, for example, for 10-14 days following an outbreak, the school may reopen.
Applying to reopen

- Submit an application to SFDPH. Your school will also need a facility review and site assessment to be approved to re-open for in-person instruction. For the application process, see https://www.sfdph.org/dph/COVID-19/Schools-Education.asp

  Your application will need to include the following documents:
  - A Health and Safety Plan outlining what the school will do to implement the requirements in this guidance and any relevant San Francisco Health Orders or Directives.

  A CDPH COVID-19 Safety Plan (CSP), consisting of two documents:
  - CDPH COVID-19 School Guidance Checklist
  - CDPH COVID-19 Cal-OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Program (CPP), required of all employers per Cal/OSHA’s Emergency Temporary Standards, published 12/1/2020. Your school’s Health and Safety Plan can serve as your CPP if it includes all the elements required by Cal-OSHA.

- Post your CDPH COVID-19 Safety Plan on your school or LEA website’s homepage at least 5 days before reopening. Schools that have already reopened should have posted their CDPH COVID-19 Safety Plan on their website’s homepage by February 1, 2021.

Prepare for re-opening

- Designate a COVID-19 staff liaison to be the single point of contact at each school for questions or concerns around practices, protocols, or potential exposure. This person will also serve as a liaison to SFDPH.

- Establish health and safety protocols to prevent COVID-19 transmission, as required by SFDPH Health Orders.

- Train staff and students on health and safety practices. Cal/OSHA requires that employee training cover certain COVID-19 information. See https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/coronavirus/COVID19FAQs.html

- Identify isolation rooms for students with symptoms of COVID-19 who are waiting to be picked up. Isolation rooms should be in an area where others do not enter or pass through.

- Establish protocols for staff and students with symptoms of COVID-19 and for communication with staff, students and families after a confirmed COVID-19 case at school.

- Share your school’s health and safety plan with staff, families, students and other members of the school community.
Staff considerations

Protect staff, especially those at high risk of severe COVID-19 illness. See sfcdc.org/vulnerable for a list of groups at higher risk for severe COVID-19.

- Offer options that reduce exposure risk to staff who are in groups at higher risk for severe COVID-19 (e.g. telework, reassignment, or modified job duties that limit direct interaction with staff and students).
  - Avoid assigning non-medical staff in groups at higher risk for severe COVID-19 to assess students who feel sick or monitor/care for sick students waiting to be picked up.
  - Consider the use of face shields, to be used with face coverings, for staff whose duties make it difficult to maintain physical distancing.
  - Keep staff in different stable groups from mixing. During the two weeks before school opens, do not hold in-person staff development, meetings, or team-building activities that bring together staff who will be working with different stable groups.
- Implement sick leave policies that support staff in staying home when ill.
- Monitor staff absenteeism. Plan for staff absences of 10 days due to COVID-19 infection or exposure, as community transmission increases. Have a roster of trained back-up staff.
  - Avoid combining stable groups when staff are absent, as this increases the risk of infection spreading in your school.
  - Be prepared to offer distance learning to students whose teachers must stay home due to COVID-19 infection or exposure, and no other teacher is available.

Student considerations

- Prioritize students who are likely to experience the greatest negative impacts from not being able to attend school in-person, keeping equity in mind.
- Ensure that students, including students with disabilities, have access to instruction as required by federal and state law.
- Offer distance learning to students for whom in-person attendance would pose a health risk to the student or their family/household. For a list of groups at higher risk of severe COVID-19, see sfcdc.org/vulnerable.
- Do not exclude students from in-person attendance solely because of medical conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19. Allow the child’s medical team and family to determine whether in-person attendance is safe.
Required signs

Schools that are open must post these signs:

• **Reminder to wear a face covering, stay 6 feet apart, and stay home if ill**
  Post at all public entrances and other places where the signs will be easily noticed. SFDPH-approved signs are online at [sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19](https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19)

• **Reporting unsafe conditions related to COVID-19**
  Post in staff break rooms and other staff areas.

  Signs must say that personnel can report violations of COVID-19 health orders and directives by calling 311 or online at [https://www.sf.gov/report-health-order-violation](https://www.sf.gov/report-health-order-violation), and that the employee’s identity will not be disclosed to the employer.

• **Ventilation Checklists** (indoor programs only)

  Signs must list how the program is ventilated:
  - All available windows and doors are kept open
  - Fully operational HVAC systems
  - Appropriately sized portable air cleaners in each room
  - None of the above

• **Take a Break Safely**

Strategies to prevent spread of COVID-19 in schools

**Prevent COVID-19 from entering the school**

Screen everyone entering the school for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure.

• Give staff and families of students a screening form to review at home each day. Instruct staff and students to stay home and get tested if they have COVID-19 symptoms or exposure (close contact). Schools may require staff and families to submit screening responses by app, email, on paper, or by other means.

• Ask all other persons entering the school about COVID-19 symptoms and exposures when they arrive – including parents/caregivers, visitors, contractors, and government officials. Emergency personnel responding to a 911 call do not need to be screened.

• If people answer “yes” to any of the screening and exposure questions, do not let them enter.

• If students arrive with symptoms, send them home. Keep students who are waiting to be picked up in a designated isolation room.

• Schools may choose to require temperature checks of people entering the school, either at home or upon arrival. SFDPH does not require temperature checks at schools.

For more information about screening and temperature checks, see [sfcdp.org/screen](https://sfcdp.org/screen).
Staff and children who are sick must stay home.

- Remind parents to keep students home when ill. A parent/guardian handout, “COVID-19 Health Checks/If Your Child has Symptoms” is available at https://sfcdcp.org/covidschoolschildcare.
- Encourage family members of students and staff with symptoms of COVID-19 to get tested promptly, before they can spread infection to students and staff.

Encourage staff and students to stay home for 10 days after traveling.

- Students and staff should avoid non-essential travel more than 120 miles from their home, as advised by CDPH. In addition, people arriving in or returning to San Francisco from other states or countries should quarantine for 10 days. For more information, see https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Travel-Advisory.aspx

Restrict non-essential visitors

- Limit non-essential visitors, including volunteers.
- Discourage parents and other family members from entering the school. Avoid allowing family members into classrooms and other student areas.
- School tours and open houses must meet CDPH and SFDPH requirements for gatherings. For more information, see https://sfcdcp.org/gatheringtips. Do not hold tours and open houses when students are present. Keep a log of all persons present, in case a person at the tour or open house later tests positive for COVID-19.
- For relevant Health Orders and Directives, see https://www.sfdph.org/healthorders and https://www.sfdph.org/directives.

Stable groups of staff and students

A stable group has the same staff and students each day, stays together for all activities (e.g., lunch, recess, etc.) and avoids contact with people outside the group. Keeping teachers and students in the same group lowers their exposure risk by decreasing the number of people they interact with each day. Keeping groups as small as feasible further reduces exposure risk.

- Elementary schools must keep students in stable classroom groups, no larger than the standard class size for each grade level, with the same teacher(s) for the entire day.
- Middle schools and high schools may have larger groups with students from more than one classroom. Keep stable groups as small as possible, while ensuring that groups are not segregated by race/ethnicity or socioeconomic class.
  - Limit cross-over of students and teachers as much as possible. Cross-over of students between groups is permitted to meet students’ educational needs.
  - Consider block schedules or other schedules with longer classes and fewer subjects per day, to decrease the number of students that teachers interact with each day. This will also decrease opportunities for students to mix in hallways during class changes. If a block schedule is used, groups should change no more often than every 3-4 weeks.
- School staff should document visits to classrooms that are not part of their group. Consider a sign-in sheet/log on the classroom door.
Students can be part of no more than two cohorts outside of school.

- **Students can participate in no more than 2 extracurricular cohorts, in addition to their stable instructional group at school.** This is true even if the programs are on different days of the week. For example, a child may not attend both an afterschool program MWF, a Tues-Thurs art class, and a Saturday youth sports program.
  
  - Extracurricular activities that only include students from the same instructional group do not count toward this limit. For example, if a high school cohorts students by grade, an afterschool drama club that combines students from different grades would count toward this limit, but a 9th grade drama club would not.

- **Students who play indoor moderate- or high-contact sports must NOT participate in a 2nd extracurricular cohort at the same time.** Indoor high-contact sports like basketball and hockey are higher risk for spread of COVID-19, and have been associated with outbreaks in youth.
  
  For example, a student who plays indoor basketball must not participate in any other extracurricular cohorts. However, they may continue to participate in sports, dance and exercise activities that are part of their in-person classes at school.

  For a list of moderate- and high-contact sports, see [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/outdoor-indoor-recreational-sports.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/outdoor-indoor-recreational-sports.aspx)

Limit mixing of groups, including staff assigned to different groups.

- **Stagger schedules for arrival/dismissal, recess and lunch to prevent mixing of groups.**

- Designate specific routes to enter and exit the school for each group, using as many entrances/exits as feasible.

- Minimize movement of students through hallways
  
  *Examples of strategies to keep hallways clear:*
  
  - Have a small, stable set of teachers rotate into the classroom for different subjects while students remain in the classroom.
  
  - Stagger class change times so that only one group is in the hallway at any given time.
  
  - Consider creating one-way hallways to minimize congestion. Place physical guides, like tape, on floors and sidewalks to mark one-way routes.
  
  - Assign adjacent classrooms to teachers in the same group to minimize the distance that students travel between classes.

- Gatherings of more than one group are currently prohibited (i.e., school assemblies, performances, morning circle).
Physical distancing

*Physical distancing decreases the risk of COVID-19 from respiratory droplets.* Recent studies of school systems open for in-person learning have found that physical distancing of 3 feet is effective at preventing student transmission when combined with masks, even when community COVID-19 levels are high. However, staff are much more likely than students to infect other staff and students in classroom settings. For this reason, staff should continue to stay 6 feet away from students and from each other.

### Physical distancing for staff

- Staff must stay at least 6 feet from other adults, including staff in the same group, whenever possible.
  - Set up staff workspaces so that staff do not work or sit within 6 feet of each other.
  - Consider virtual meetings using video conferencing apps for parent-teacher meetings and staff meetings, even if all staff are on campus.
- Staff should stay at least 6 feet away from students as much as possible while meeting their developmental and learning needs.

### Physical distancing between students

- Elementary school: During group activities, playtime and recess, physical distancing may be relaxed for younger students in a classroom who are wearing face masks. When outside or in shared spaces, prioritize preventing interactions between stable groups over distancing of students within a group.
- Middle and high school: Physical distancing of students becomes more important when stable groups are larger than a single class, or if there is cross-over between stable groups.

### In the classroom

- Staff seats must be at least 6 feet away from student seats, regardless of space limitations.
- Students must be seated at least 3 feet apart.
- Consider using alternative spaces like cafeterias and auditoriums for instruction to allow more space between students.
- Have students sit in the same seats each day if feasible. Avoid changing seat assignments more often than every 3-4 weeks, unless needed for student safety or well-being. If groups change classrooms for different subjects, try to keep the same seating arrangements across classes.
- Students may move about the classroom to obtain supplies, turn in work, or to go to another part of the classroom, even if they pass within 3 feet of another student while moving from one place to another. For example, students may leave their desks to be part of a reading group on a classroom rug.

### Outside the classroom

- Limit occupancy of bathrooms, elevators, locker rooms, staff rooms, and other shared spaces to decrease congestion and crowding. Adjacent bathroom stalls may be used. Post signs with occupancy limits.
- At places where students congregate or wait in line, mark spots on the floor or the walls to indicate where to stand.
• Consider eliminating use of lockers in hallways and other shared spaces.  
  *Example:* Assign lockers so that students in the same stable group are given lockers at least 3 feet apart, and stagger times for locker access between groups.

• Consider suspending uniform requirements for PE, so that students do not need to use the locker room to change.

**Face masks and cloth face coverings**

*Face masks and other face coverings keep people from spreading the infection to others, by trapping respiratory droplets before they can travel through the air. They also help protect the person wearing the face covering from infection.*

For this guidance, “face masks” includes cloth face coverings that cover the mouth and nose and do not have an exhalation valve.

• All adults and students must wear face masks over *both their nose and mouth* while on campus. This includes family members and caregivers dropping-off or picking-up students outside the building.

• People may not enter the building unless they are wearing a face mask or have documentation of a medical contraindication to face masks.

• Provide face masks to students who forget to bring their face mask to school. Reusable cloth face masks are recommended over disposable masks, and can be sent home with families to be laundered.

• Keep a supply of face masks for other individuals who have forgotten to bring one.

• CDPH requires schools to exclude students from in-person attendance if the student refuses to wear a face mask and does not have a medical exemption.

• Some students will need additional support to consistently wear face masks. Schools should take into account equity and each student’s individual circumstances when deciding how to best support students in wearing face masks.

• Do not exclude students from in-person learning if they have an approved medical exemption to face masks. For students whose exemptions are due to developmental delay, autism or other conditions that limit their ability to tolerate face masks, encourage and remind them to wear their face mask as much as possible.

For these students and others who have difficulty wearing face masks at all times, prioritize consistent face mask use in the following situations:

• In hallways, bathrooms and other shared spaces where students may encounter staff and students from other stable groups.

• For younger students, during times when physical distancing is relaxed.

• When off-campus in public spaces, for example, when walking to a nearby park or outside the building at drop-off or pick-up.

• When a student is ill and waiting to be picked up (and is not asleep).

• Exclusion from in-person learning should be done only after exhausting efforts to support students in consistently wearing a face mask. Offer alternative educational opportunities for students who must be excluded from campus.
Exemptions to face masks and cloth face coverings; use of face shields

- Students with documented medical or behavioral contraindications to face masks and cloth face coverings are exempt. This includes children who are unable to tolerate face masks due to autism or developmental delay and children unable to independently remove face masks due to developmental delay or disability. Seat students who cannot wear face masks at least 6 feet away from other students, if possible to do so without stigmatizing the student.

- School districts’ or independent schools’ health teams must confirm student exemptions. Students with exemptions must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, if their condition permits it.

- Asthma, claustrophobia, and anxiety are not generally considered to be contraindications to face masks.

- However, this is not as effective as a face mask in preventing spread of infection.

- Staff not wearing a face covering, face shield with a drape or other effective alternative, for any reason, should be at least six feet apart from all other persons unless the unmasked employee is tested at least twice weekly for COVID-19. Do not use COVID-19 testing as an alternative to face coverings when face coverings are otherwise required.

- Staff with a medical contraindication to face mask, documented by a medical provider, may be allowed to wear a face shield with a cloth drape on the bottom tucked into the top of their shirt. Staff working alone in a private indoor space do not need to wear a face mask if
  - The space is completely enclosed (i.e. a private office, not a cubicle), and
  - Other people are not likely to enter the space at any time in the next few days.

  Staff working alone in a classroom that others will use later are not exempt, and must wear a mask. Similarly, administrators in a private office must wear a mask, even when alone, if they can reasonably expect others to enter their office to ask questions or to meet.

- Staff working with students who are hard-of-hearing may use a clear mask (a disposable or cloth face mask with a clear inset). If this is not feasible, a face shield with a cloth drape tucked into the shirt or a clear barrier may also be used. Staff should wear a face mask at other times.

- Do not use face shields in place of face masks in other situations. Face shields have not been shown to keep the wearer from infecting others.

- Consider using a face shield in addition to a face mask. Face shields provide additional eye protection for the wearer. When a face shield is used with a mask, a cloth drape is not needed.

For more information, see

https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/files/Order-C19-12-Face-Coverings.pdf
https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx
Ventilation and outdoor spaces

*Being outside is much lower risk than being inside. When indoors, increasing outdoor air circulation lowers the risk of infection by “diluting” any infectious respiratory virus in the air with fresh outdoor air.*

Outdoor spaces

- Do as many activities outside as possible, especially higher-risk activities like snacks/meals and exercise.
- Stagger use of outdoor spaces to keep groups from mixing. If the outdoor space is large enough, consider designating separate spaces for each group.
- Outdoor spaces may be covered with a tent, canopy, or other shelter, as long as the shelter complies with CDPH and SFDPH guidelines for ventilation of outdoor structures, at [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Use-of-Temporary-Structures-for-Outdoor-Business-Operations.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Use-of-Temporary-Structures-for-Outdoor-Business-Operations.aspx) and [https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/Guidance-Shared-Outdoor-Spaces.pdf](https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/Guidance-Shared-Outdoor-Spaces.pdf)
- Outdoor playgrounds/natural play areas only need routine maintenance. Make sure that children wash or sanitize their hands before and after using these areas. When hand hygiene is emphasized, cleaning of outdoor play structures is not needed between groups.

Make sure that indoor spaces are well-ventilated.

*Ventilation systems can decrease the number of infectious respiratory droplets in the air by replacing indoor air with fresh, uncontaminated air and/or filtering droplets out of the air.*

SFDPH reviews ventilation as part of all schools’ applications to reopen for in-person instruction. Schools must make any ventilation improvements required by SFDPH.

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.
- Do not prop or wedge open fire doors. Continue to follow fire and building safety requirements.
- 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.
- If your program has an HVAC system (sometimes called mechanical ventilation, forced air, or central air), maximize the intake of outdoor air and minimizing recirculated air.
- Consider portable air cleaners (“HEPA filters”).
- If the school uses fans, adjust the direction of fans to so that air does not blow from one person’s space to another’s space.

Testing

Routine testing of asymptomatic staff and students in San Francisco schools that have reopened have shown very low rates of COVID-19 infection, especially for students. This matches the findings from New York City and other school districts that have reopened for in-person learning. In San Francisco, very few tests have been positive, and the vast majority of these have been false positive COVID-19 tests. For these reasons, SFDPH no longer recommends routinely testing students without COVID-19 symptoms or exposures, and no longer recommends routinely testing staff without COVID-19 symptoms or exposure in yellow and orange tiers.

See Health Officer Directive No. 2020-33 for detailed information about current testing requirements for schools, at https://www.sfdph.org/directives

- Staff at school sites offering in-person instruction must be tested within seven days before their first day of work at the school site.

- Schools must test asymptomatic staff and students at school sites offering in-person instruction as listed below. Students and staff who have had COVID-19 in the last 90 days, confirmed by a lab test, are exempt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yellow/Orange</th>
<th>Red/Purple</th>
<th>Deep Purple when Adjusted Case Rate &gt;14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asymptomatic staff with no known exposures</td>
<td>Not required.</td>
<td>All staff, every 2 weeks</td>
<td>All staff, weekly PCR or twice weekly antigen testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptomatic students with no known exposures</td>
<td>Not required.</td>
<td>Not required.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- At this time, rapid antigen testing is only recommended for twice-weekly screening testing.

- If a person without symptoms has a positive rapid antigen test, the result should be confirmed with a PCR test. If the PCR is negative, the person is considered NOT to have COVID-19. For details, see https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antigen-tests-guidelines.html#evaluating-test-results

- Cal/OSHA requires that staff be tested weekly during an outbreak. Workers who are exposed on the job must also be offered testing. For more information, see https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/coronavirus/COVID19FAQs.html#testing

Hand hygiene

Frequent handwashing and hand sanitizer use removes COVID-19 germs from people’s hands before they can infect themselves by touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

- Develop routines for staff and students in all grades to wash or sanitize their hands, especially before and after eating, upon entering/re-entering a classroom, and before and after touching shared equipment such as computer keyboards.

- Every classroom/instructional space and common area (staff work rooms, eating areas) must have hand sanitizer or a place to wash hands upon entering.
- Establish procedures to ensure that sinks and handwashing stations do not run out of soap or paper towels, and that hand sanitizer does not run out.

- Post signs encouraging hand hygiene. A hand hygiene sign in multiple languages is available for download at [http://eziz.org/assets/docs/IMM-825.pdf](http://eziz.org/assets/docs/IMM-825.pdf)

**Limit sharing**
- Consider suspending or modifying use of drinking fountains. Encourage the use of reusable water bottles instead. Water bottle filling stations, or “hydration stations,” may remain open.
- Limit sharing of individual art supplies, manipulatives, and other high-touch materials when possible.
- Students may use shared supplies and equipment such as computers, books, games, play areas, and area rugs. Have students wash or sanitize their hands before and after using shared supplies and equipment.

**Cleaning and disinfection**

*Routine cleaning should continue, but routine disinfection is no longer recommended in schools by CDPH. Contaminated surfaces are not thought to be a significant route of transmission, and frequent disinfection can pose a health risk to students due to the strong chemicals often used.*

- Clean frequently touched surfaces daily and between stable groups. Routine cleaning focuses on frequently touched surfaces like door handles, shared desks and tables, light switches, sink handles, and keyboards.
  - Desks and chairs that are only used by one person do not need to be cleaned daily.
  - Paper-based materials like books, magazines and envelopes do not need routine cleaning between uses.
- After a known case of COVID-19, clean and disinfect the areas where the person with COVID-19 spent a large proportion of their time (classroom, or an administrator’s office). Take the following steps:
  - Open windows and use fans to increase outdoor air circulation in the areas to be cleaned.
  - Wait 24 hours, or as long as practical, before cleaning and disinfection.
  - Clean and disinfect all surfaces in the areas used by the ill person, including electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, and remote controls. Use a disinfectant effective against COVID-19. See [EPA’s List N](https://www.epa.gov/ee/disinfectants-effective-against-covid-19) for EPA-approved disinfectants effective against COVID-19.
  - Vacuum the space if needed.

Specific situations

Staff break rooms and teacher work rooms

Break rooms are a common source of COVID-19 exposure in all work settings. Staff often do not view themselves and colleagues as sources of infection, and may forget to take precautions with co-workers, especially during social interactions such as breaks or lunch time, in the copy room, when checking mailboxes, etc.

- Strongly discourage staff from eating together, especially indoors.
  - Schools must notify staff that they should not eat indoors when possible.
  - Schools must provide an outdoor break area, if feasible, for staff to eat.
- Discourage staff from gathering in break rooms and other indoor staff spaces.
- Limit the number of people in indoor break rooms and other staff spaces to the lesser of a) 25% of the maximum occupancy or b) the number of people allowed by 6 foot distancing.
- Post the maximum occupancy for break rooms and other staff areas.
- Post required signs in break rooms, including signs reminding staff to stay 6 feet apart, keep their facemasks on unless eating, and wash their hands before and after eating
- Open windows and doors to maximize ventilation, when feasible, especially if staff are eating or if the room is near maximum occupancy.

Transportation

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

- School Buses
  - Parents/guardians should screen students for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure before students leave home to ride the bus.
  - Drivers and passengers must wear face coverings over their nose and mouth, unless a student has a documented medical or behavioral contraindication. Drivers should carry a supply of face coverings in case a student forgets theirs.
  - Students must sit at least 6 feet away from the driver.
  - Maximize space between students. Students from the same household may sit together.
  - Keep vehicle windows open when weather and safety permit.
  - Buses should be cleaned daily and after transporting any individual with COVID-19.
- Public transportation: Staggered school start times might allow students and staff who use public transportation to do so when buses and trains are less crowded. This will decrease their exposure risk.
- Carpools and shared rides: Advise staff and families to carpool with the same stable group of people. Open windows and maximize outdoor air circulation. Everyone in the vehicle should wear a face covering.
Arrival and dismissal

If students and parents/caregivers from different households gather and interact with each other during arrival and dismissal, this creates an opportunity for COVID-19 to spread in the school community.

- Stagger arrival and dismissal times to minimize contact, using different entrances/exits for each group.
- Mark spaces 6 feet apart for students waiting to enter the building and for adults waiting to pick up students. Post signs to remind family members to stay 6 feet away from people from other households when dropping off or picking up their student.
- Face coverings are required for adults who are dropping off or picking up children in person. Provide face coverings for family members who have forgotten theirs.

Meals and snacks

Eating together is especially high risk for COVID-19 transmission because people must remove their masks to eat and drink. People often touch their mouths with their hands when eating. In addition, meals are usually considered time for talking together, which further increases risk, especially if students must speak loudly to be heard.

- Eat meals outdoors or in the group’s classroom instead of using cafeterias or dining rooms, when feasible. Use individually plated or bagged meals. Do not use shared tables or self-service buffets.
- Eating outdoors is safer than eating indoors.
  - Designate an outdoor eating area for each class, and mark places 6 feet apart for students to sit. Without marked spaces, most students will sit more closely.
  - Outdoor eating areas may be covered (e.g., by a tent, canopy, or other shelter), as long as the shelter complies with both CDPH and SFDPH guidance, at https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Use-of-Temporary-Structures-for-Outdoor-Business-Operations.aspx and https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/Guidance-Shared-Outdoor-Spaces.pdf.
- Stagger lunch times to prevent mixing of groups and to maximize use of outdoor space.
- Consider having meals delivered to the classroom or outdoor eating area instead of having students go to the cafeteria for meals.
- Staff should be especially vigilant about staying 6 feet away from students, and making sure that students remain 6 feet apart, when students’ masks are off to eat. If eating in the classroom, make sure that students are spaced as far apart as possible.
- Everyone should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer immediately before and after eating. Pay special attention to younger students who are more likely to eat with their hands or suck/lick their hands clean.
- Consider starting lunch with silent eating time, followed by conversation time, to discourage talking while masks are off.
- Clean and disinfect the eating area between different classes. Sidewalks and asphalt do not have to be disinfected.
Field trips

- Outdoor field trips are allowed as long as they do not require shared vehicles or public transportation. For example, field trips that involve walking to a nearby park are allowed. Do not let students mix with people outside their cohort on field trips. Specifically, schools cannot use a public playground during times when the playground is open to the public, per SFDPH playground guidance. However, if the playground operator permits, a school may reserve a time for the exclusive use of the playground.

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

*Sports and activities involving singing, chanting, shouting, cheering, and performing with wind instruments are higher risk for spreading 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 than with face masks. Schools that offer these activities should take all possible steps to lower the risk of COVID-19.*

Sports, dance and group exercise


- Physical movement and activity in the classroom are still allowed. For example, “air writing” and other movement designed to help children learn letters, or distinguish left from right; clapping hands or stomping feet, standing, stretching, meditation, and doing the “hokey pokey” to recorded music are all acceptable activities.

Wind instruments, singing and related activities

Students and staff may play a wind instrument (i.e. woodwind or brass), sing, cheer, chant, or sing when all of the following conditions are met:

- Outdoor only
- Physical distancing of at least 6 feet from others in the group
- Physical distancing of at least 12 feet away from an audience or any observers
- Wearing a face mask or using an instrument cover (for instruments) when within 12 feet of others.
  - Face masks and/or instrument covers are strongly encouraged at all distances.
  - Instrument covers should be made of materials similar to those required for face coverings. Review Directive on Face Coverings at [https://www.sfdph.org/directives](https://www.sfdph.org/directives).
  - To cover their nose, musicians may wear a face covering with a mouth-slit in addition to, but not in place of, an instrument cover.
- No more than 25 people per group. This limit does not apply to people in the group who play percussion, string, or other non-wind instruments.
- Sideline cheer, band, drumline or other supporting groups are not allowed to attend sporting events at this time, per CDPH guidance.
• “Cheer” refers to informal cheering. Competitive cheerleading teams should follow the guidance for sports.

Students receiving special services
• Provide accommodations and related services for special education, learning disabilities and medical conditions, even if it creates cross-over between stable groups.
• Additional accommodations may be needed for students to safely attend class. For example, a student who cannot tolerate a face covering due to a medical or developmental condition may need a desk with a partition or clear screen. Other students may need additional supervision and support around physical distancing, wearing a face covering, or handwashing.
• Nurses and therapists who are not school employees but work with students in schools, such as occupational therapists and physical therapists, are considered essential staff and should be allowed on campus to provide services.
  o When students are unable to attend school due to COVID-19 infection or exposure, consider remote video sessions for therapy.

What to do when someone has COVID-19 symptoms or confirmed COVID-19

Refer to the Quick Guide for Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 Cases.

First, see the Quick Guide for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 at sfcdcp.org/COVIDSchoolsChildcare for the following summary charts:
• Steps to take when staff or children have COVID-19 symptoms, have been exposed (for example, a parent or sibling has tested positive), or have confirmed COVID-19.
• Returning to school after COVID-19 symptoms, close contact, or confirmed COVID-19.

For staff or students with symptoms of COVID-19
• Staff who become ill while at school must notify their supervisor and leave work as soon as they can.
• Send ill students home. Keep students who are waiting to be picked up in a designated isolation room. Make sure that students keep their face coverings on.
• When a parent or guardian arrives to pick up a student, have the student walk outside to meet them if possible instead of allowing the parent or guardian into the building. The parent may also have COVID-19, since children are most often infected by an adult in their home.

For confirmed COVID-19 cases, take these steps
All documents listed below are online at sfcdcp.org/COVIDSchoolsChildcare.

1. Use the Exposure and Investigation tool to collect the important details about the case BEFORE contacting the School/Childcare Team.
2. If possible, obtain a copy of the lab report and attach it to Exposure and Investigation tool. If the school does not have the test results yet, please note the test results are pending. Send the lab result to the School/Childcare team when you receive it.
3. Report the case **within 1 hour** to the SFDPH Schools and Childcare Hub by emailing schools-childcaresites@sfdph.org (please put SECURE: in the subject line) OR calling (628) 217-7499. An on-call public health professional will get back to you as soon as possible.

4. The Schools and Childcare Hub may ask you to identify people who had close contact with the COVID-19 case and may have been infected. When interviewing people to determine if they had close contact, and informing them that they may have been exposed, **do not disclose the identity of the person with COVID-19**, as required by law.

5. Use the List of Close Contacts template to collect details of any close contacts.

6. Email the List of Close Contacts to schools-childcaresites@sfdph.org **within 24 hours**. Please put SECURE: in the subject line of the email.

7. Communicate to your school community **within one business day** as indicated in the Quick Guide. SFDPH has developed standard notification letters for schools. Translations are at sfcdcp.org/CovidSchoolsChildcare.
   - Close Contact Advisory — Children and Youth under 18
   - Close Contact Advisory — Adult
   - General Exposure Advisory — Children and Youth under 18
   - General Exposure Advisory — Adult
   - Notification of an school member in quarantine for exposure to COVID-19

**Clean and disinfect areas where the person with COVID-19 spent significant time**

- Open windows in areas used by the sick person to maximize outdoor air circulation.
- Clean and disinfect the classroom and other areas where the person spend significant time. This does not have to be done until students and staff have left for the day.
- If needed, find alternative locations for classes whose regular classroom is being cleaned or disinfected.

**Deciding if your school should close due to COVID-19**

Schools should avoid unilaterally closing due to community surges in COVID-19, without direction from public health officials. Doing so may not decrease the risk to staff and students. In fact, it could lead to more COVID-19 infections if it results in staff and students spending more time in settings where the risk of becoming infected is higher than in school.

Even when COVID-19 is widespread in the general community, spread of COVID-19 in schools has remained rare. Almost all cases of COVID-19 in schools in San Francisco have been in staff and students who were infected outside of the school. Routine testing of elementary school staff and students has also provided reassuring evidence of the low risk of transmission in schools.

This reflects the success of schools in implementing precautions like face masks, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and staying home when sick. When these basic precautions are enforced, they are very effective at protecting people from COVID-19. In contrast, people not following these precautions in informal or unsupervised settings has been largely responsible for community spread of COVID-19.

The decision to close a school should be based on COVID-19 cases within the school, not on community COVID-19 rates, which may not reflect the conditions at the school. Any decisions should be made in consultation with SFDPH. In general, schools with smaller, more contained stable groups are less likely to require closure.
Situations where SFDPH may recommend closing a school may include the following:

- 25% or more of the stable groups in a school have had outbreaks\(^1\) in the last 14 days.
- At least three outbreaks have occurred in the last 14 days AND more than 5% of the school population is infected.
- Investigation of an outbreak by SFDPH suggests ongoing COVID-19 transmission within the school.

A more common situation is that schools that do not limit interactions between staff assigned to different groups may be forced to close due to staff shortages after a staff member tests positive, if a number of other staff were exposed and must quarantine.

Closures are generally for 10-14 days, and are meant to prevent further transmission within the school as well as to better understand how transmission in a school occurred, in order to prevent repeat outbreaks.

Resources

**San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)**

- **SFDPH Schools and Childcare Hub** for COVID-19 consultation and guidance (628) 217-7499 or schools-childcaresites@sfdph.org
- COVID-19 guidance for the public, including employers [https://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19](https://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19)
- COVID-19 guidance for schools at [https://sfcdc.org/CovidSchoolsChildcare](https://sfcdc.org/CovidSchoolsChildcare)
  - “What to do when someone has suspected or confirmed COVID-19: Quick Guide for Schools, Childcares, and Programs for Children and Youth”
  - “Parent and Caregiver Handout: COVID-19 Health Checks/If Your Child has Symptoms”
    - Instructions for parents on health screenings and return to school criteria

**California Department of Public Health (CDPH)**

- “COVID-19 and Reopening In-Person Instruction Framework & Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools in California, 2020-2021 School Year” updated 3/20/2021 [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19-K12-Schools-InPerson-Instruction.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19-K12-Schools-InPerson-Instruction.aspx)

---

\(^1\) An outbreak is 3 or more COVID-19 cases in a school in a 14-day period, where the transmission likely happened at school. For example, 3 cases in 3 siblings would not constitute an outbreak, nor would 3 cases in students who also play on a sports team already being investigated for an outbreak. Similarly, 3 cases in students or staff who do not have contact (or overlap in shared spaces) in the school would not be considered an outbreak.
- State of California Safe Schools for All
  https://schools.covid19.ca.gov/
  - 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

- Guidance Related to Cohorts
  https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/small-groups-child-youth.aspx

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

California Department of Education (CDE)
- “Stronger Together A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California’s Public Schools”
  https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/documents/strongertogether.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Schools and Child Care Programs

- Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation

American Academy of Pediatrics
- “COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry”