



## IDPH & ISBE Joint Summary of CDC's Operational Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) have updated this joint summary, fully adopting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#) and related [CDC FAQ](#) (updated as of May 27, 2022). This updated guidance supersedes all prior COVID-19 school guidance documents and applies to all public and nonpublic schools that serve students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (pre-K-12).

Schools and local health departments should exercise their longstanding authority, including as described in the [Communicable Disease Code](#) and according to schools' infectious disease policies, to address all infectious disease cases among students and staff. IDPH and ISBE strongly encourage schools to follow the CDC's operational guidance on best practices and the recommendations of their local health department on [quarantine and isolation](#) for confirmed and probable cases and close contacts. Schools are encouraged to follow the CDC's best practices for all infectious diseases to keep students home if ill, use testing to confirm or rule out COVID-19 infection, and use Test to Stay with masking and diagnostic testing to keep asymptomatic close contacts and those linked to an outbreak in school. Schools must continue to provide [remote learning](#) to any student who is under isolation or quarantine for COVID-19 based on the State Superintendent's Remote Learning Declaration.

Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to prevent adverse outcomes related to COVID-19. People who are [up to date with COVID-19 vaccines](#) are at low risk of symptomatic or severe infection, hospitalization, and death. To promote vaccination in school communities, Section 3 of [Executive Order 2021-22](#) was reissued and remains in effect. Accordingly, school personnel must establish they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or submit to at least weekly testing for COVID-19.

On February 25, 2022, the CDC released a [new framework](#) to monitor the level of COVID-19 in communities that includes hospitalizations, hospital capacity, and cases, which is currently in use. This approach focuses recommendations on minimizing severe disease, limiting strain on the healthcare system, and enabling those at highest risk to protect themselves against infection and severe disease. Rather than focusing on eliminating all virus transmission, the CDC recommends prevention measures, such as masks, when the level of severe disease in communities has the potential to overwhelm the healthcare system. These prevention measures can reduce that strain and avoid crisis.

The updated [CDC school guidance](#) aligns with [Community Levels](#) for recommendations for testing and masking. Community levels can help schools and local health departments, as well as individuals, make decisions based on their local context and their unique needs. When



communities are at a “high” level, the CDC recommends universal indoor masking as masks are critical to keeping classrooms open for in-person learning. In all Community Levels, staff and students with COVID-19-like symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask around others. Schools should also consider implementing screening testing for high-risk activities such as indoor sports and extracurricular activities, when students are returning from breaks, and for those serving students who are at high risk for getting very sick with COVID-19. The following chart summarizing masking and testing recommendations at the three Community Levels.

COVID Community Level	Prevention Strategy for <a href="#">Masking</a>	Prevention Strategy for Testing
Low	Support those who choose to continue to mask	Ensure access to diagnostic testing for symptomatic persons and those exposed, and for continuity, schools may choose to continue to implement screening testing
Medium	Person who are immunocompromised, at high risk for severe disease or have household or social contacts at high risk for severe disease, should be encouraged to talk to their healthcare providers about whether they need to wear a mask	Ensure access to diagnostic testing for close contacts and those exposed, and for continuity, schools may choose to continue to use screening testing
High	Universal masking indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status, should be promoted. Persons who are immunocompromised should be encouraged to wear a mask or respiratory that provides greater protection.	Ensure access to diagnostic testing for close contacts and those exposed, and for continuity, schools may choose to continue to use screening testing

Masks continue to be federally required in healthcare settings and for healthcare personnel, including school nurse offices.

The updated [CDC guidance](#) recommends “strategies for everyday operations” or actions schools can take every day to prevent the spread of infectious disease, including the virus that causes COVID-19. The following strategies should be in place at all Community Levels:

- Promote staying up to date with all routine vaccinations
- Implement policies that encourage students and staff to stay home when sick
- Optimize [ventilation systems](#)
- Reinforce proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Utilize proper cleaning and disinfection procedures



The following COVID-19 prevention strategies outlined in the CDC guidance remain important to protect students and community members, especially those who are not up to date on COVID-19 vaccination, and in areas where the [COVID-19 community levels](#) are medium or high, and to allow schools to safely deliver in-person instruction. Schools, with help from local health departments, should consider local context when selecting strategies to prioritize for implementation. Schools should balance risk of COVID-19 with educational, social, and mental health outcomes when deciding which prevention strategies to put in place.

- [Diagnostic and screening testing](#) to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks
- [Test to Stay](#) Programs
- [Ventilation](#) Improvements
- [Case Investigation and Contact Tracing](#) or other methods to inform people who might have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 in the school environment of their potential exposure and the actions they should take to remain safe and reduce transmission.
- Persons identified as [close contacts](#) (persons not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination who were within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more in a 24 hour period) should quarantine for five days consistent with [CDC guidance](#) and mask for 5 additional days, or 10 days if unable to mask. For those up to date with COVID-19 vaccination, masks should be worn for 10 days after exposure.

IDPH and ISBE continue to maintain additional guidance documents addressing Illinois-specific guidance for the following

- [COVID-19 Interim Guidance For Schools Decision Tree for Evaluating Symptomatic Individuals from Pre-K-12 Schools](#)
- [Interim Guidance on Testing for COVID-19 in Community Settings and Schools](#)