



Department of Public Health

MAYOR
Oscar Leeser

CITY OF EL PASO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH COVID-19 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOL 2021-2022

CITY COUNCIL

July 19, 2021

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Tommy Gonzalez

The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH) issues the following recommendations for the 2021-2022 academic year. The DPH recognizes the numerous benefits of in-person instruction. The following recommendations are based on current medical evidence concerning COVID-19 and take into consideration the level of community transmission reflected by new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19.

These recommendations consider the vaccination of eligible individuals against COVID-19 as the foundation for building a comprehensive and layered plan to keep students, teachers, and staff safe at school. These recommendations consider the risk of infection and transmission of COVID-19 among students, teachers, and staff as well as the varying developmental stages of students. These recommendations steer away from a “one blanket approach” and specifically focuses on in-person instruction.

As vaccination efforts continue in our community, the benefits of herd immunity will be reflected in schools. Vaccinated individuals will not need to quarantine or test for COVID-19 following a known exposure unless they become symptomatic within 14 days after exposure. Furthermore, fully vaccinated individuals may choose not to wear face masks. Conversely, unvaccinated individuals should quarantine and be tested following a known exposure. Further, it is strongly recommended that unvaccinated individuals continue to wear face masks.

While physical distancing between elementary school students may no longer be required, hygiene will continue to be of utmost importance in addition to other interventions such as isolation of sick students and the use of face masks for unvaccinated students. Distancing of at least 3 feet between desks continues to be recommended for middle schools and high schools, if feasible.

Following are detailed recommendations for the three levels of education:

Angela Mora – Health Director

Department of Public Health | 5115 El Paso Drive | El Paso, TX 79905
O: (915) 212-6502 | <https://www.elpasotexas.gov/public-health/>



DELIVERING **EXCEPTIONAL SERVICES**



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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Distancing:

- Distancing is of utmost importance for children who are sick and symptomatic. Isolating children as soon as a teacher or other staff identifies them as sick is imperative.
- Distancing students' desks may not be feasible due to space limitations and learning activities requiring student interaction.
- Children can remain in pods for indoor activities such as lunch in the cafeteria.
- Distancing is not necessary outdoors.

Hygiene:

- Teach proper handwashing and allow time between activities for handwashing.
- Encourage students to bring their own water bottles and allow students to refill bottles in school.
- Keep water fountains functional and promote the use of water bottles at the fountains to avoid bringing the face and mouth to the water spout.
- Recommend that unvaccinated students wear face masks.
- Teach proper face mask use and, for mask wearers, recommend bringing several for the day/week.
- Enhance cleaning and disinfection of water fountains.
- Teach children to keep their desk/working area clean.
- Continue enhanced cleaning and sanitation of schools.

Health:

- Continue health screenings, preferably before school to identify those who are sick. Those identified as sick at school should be sent to the nurse's office for further evaluation.
- Avoid emphasis on perfect attendance to allow parents to keep children at home if feeling sick or quarantining.
- Recommend testing for children and adults that are sick and symptomatic.
- Routine testing is not recommended.
- Encourage vaccination for those who are eligible but not vaccinated.
- Fully vaccinated students who are exposed to COVID-19 do not need to quarantine.

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- DPH does not require quarantining of asymptomatic elementary school students exposed to a positive COVID-19 classmate. However, students should be observed for symptoms 14 days after exposure.
- DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines should be followed for unvaccinated adults.
- Continue keeping census of children for contact tracing purposes.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Distancing:

- The most important aspect of distancing will be for those students that are sick and symptomatic. Isolating students as soon as a teacher or other staff identifies them as sick is the most important aspect.
- Distancing students' desks may not be feasible within the classroom because of space constraints.
- If school has a high COVID-19 immunization rate (75% or higher) for students and adults, distancing between healthy vaccinated students and adults is not necessary and should not be a priority.
- Students can remain in pods for indoor group activities such as lunch in the cafeteria, etc. No distancing between students is required outdoors.
- It is recommended that teachers switch classrooms instead of mixing student groups.

Hygiene:

- Recommend that unvaccinated students wear face masks.
- Teach proper face mask use, and for mask wearers, recommend bringing several for the day/week.
- Teach proper handwashing and allow time for handwashing.
- Encourage students to bring their own water bottles and allow students to refill water bottles in school.
- Keep water fountains functional and promote the use of water bottles at the fountains to avoid bringing the face and mouth to the water spout.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of water fountains is recommended.
- Discourage individuals from placing their face and mouth directly on water fountains and water spouts.
- Encourage students to keep their desk clean.
- Continue enhanced cleaning and sanitation of schools.

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Health:

- Continue health screenings, preferably before school to identify those who are sick. Those identified as sick at school should be sent to nurse's office for further evaluation.
- Avoid emphasis on perfect attendance to allow parents to keep children at home if feeling sick or quarantining.
- Testing is recommended for those students who are sick and symptomatic.
- Testing of fully vaccinated students after exposure is not recommended unless they become symptomatic.
- No routine testing is recommended.
- Encourage vaccination of those who are eligible but not vaccinated.
- Quarantine or testing of exposed students and adults is not required if they are fully vaccinated.
- Quarantine and testing of adults or students who are not fully vaccinated is recommended after a known exposure. Follow DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines for unvaccinated adults.
- Continue keeping census of children for contact tracing purposes.

HIGH SCHOOL

Distancing:

- Distancing is a critical element that must be observed for students and adults that are sick and symptomatic. Isolating students as soon as a teacher or other staff identifies them as sick is critical.
- Distancing between students may not be feasible within the classroom due to space constraints.
- If school has a high COVID-19 immunization rate (75% or higher) for students and adults, distancing between healthy vaccinated students and adults is not necessary and should not be a priority.
- Students may remain in pods for indoor group activities such as lunch in the cafeteria, etc. No distancing between students is required outdoors.
- It is recommended that teachers switch classrooms instead of mixing student groups.

Hygiene:

- Recommend that those who are not vaccinated wear face masks.

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- Promote and encourage proper handwashing and allow time for handwashing.
- Encourage students to bring their own water bottles and allow them to refill their bottles in school.
- Keep water fountains functional and promote the use of water bottles at the fountains to avoid bringing the face and mouth to water spout.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of water fountains is recommended.
- Discourage individuals from placing their face and mouth directly on water fountains and water spouts.
- Encourage students to keep their desks clean.
- Continue enhanced cleaning and sanitation of schools.

Health:

- Continue health screenings, preferably before school to identify those who are sick. Those identified as sick at school should be sent to nurse's office for further evaluation.
- Avoid emphasis on perfect attendance to allow parents to keep students at home if feeling sick or quarantining.
- Testing is recommended for those students that are sick and symptomatic.
- Testing of fully vaccinated students after exposure is not recommended unless they become symptomatic.
- No routine testing of entire student body or faculty is recommended.
- Encourage vaccination of those who are eligible but not vaccinated.
- No quarantine or testing is recommended for exposed students and adults if they are fully vaccinated.
- Quarantining and testing is recommended after exposure for students or adults that are not fully vaccinated. DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines should be followed for unvaccinated students and adults.
- Continue keeping census of students for contact tracing purposes.
- Student athletes who are not fully vaccinated may be tested routinely before games.
- Students diagnosed with COVID-19 should not be tested routinely before games for 90 days following date of diagnosis. After 90 days, they should continue be routinely tested before games if NOT fully vaccinated.
- RTP protocol still in effect for student athletes sick with COVID while in sport season.

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SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

Students with Special Medical Needs:

Vaccination against COVID-19 is strongly recommended for all eligible students, unless contraindicated. It is of utmost importance that teachers and staff working with students with special medical needs be vaccinated against COVID-19 to considerably reduce the risk of infection and prevent outbreaks and complications among medically vulnerable students.

Face masks will not be discouraged for those students whose parents choose for the students to wear them. However, it is strongly recommended that unvaccinated adults wear face masks while caring for students with special medical needs.

Distancing between students with special medical needs, teachers, and aides may not be feasible but it is recommended in order to maintain the same staff and students within the classroom and to decrease the risk of infection.

The DPH continues to recommend the enhanced cleaning and sanitation of used spaces and frequent handwashing practices by students and staff. Maintaining pods of students and teachers as part of a comprehensive prevention strategy within a layered safety plan of a school has proven to be an effective practice.

Face Masks on School Buses:

On January 29, 2021, the CDC issued an order requiring face masks to be worn by all people while on public transportation, including school buses.

Texas Governor Gregg Abbot, under executive order GA-36, has prohibited schools from requiring face masks. However, face masks continue to be strongly recommended for unvaccinated individuals and schools should follow their legal department's advice on compliance with current federal and state mandates.

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