

Recommendations for Safer School Operations during COVID-19

Schools Should Require Face Masks for All

Michigan.gov/Coronavirus

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The state is committed to ensuring that Michigan students and educators are as safe as possible in the classroom to enable in person learning. The highly transmissible Delta variant is spreading rapidly across the nation, making it essential for schools to adopt prevention policies to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Because many students have yet to be vaccinated and students under age 12 are not yet eligible, layered prevention measures - [including universal masking](#) - must be put in place for consistent in-person learning to be maintained and to keep kids, staff, and families safe.

Though COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred in schools, multiple studies document that transmission of COVID-19 within the school setting can be prevented by implementing multiple prevention strategies, even when community transmission of COVID-19 is high. Schools should require masking and work with their local health department for additional mitigation measures, especially if their community has a low vaccination rate and COVID transmission is substantial or high according to [CDC metrics](#).

MDHHS recommends that all schools adopt policies to:

- Promote **vaccination** for eligible students, staff, and families.
- Require **universal masking** for all students, staff, and visitors regardless of community transmission rate or vaccination status.
- Implement **layered prevention measures** outlined below.

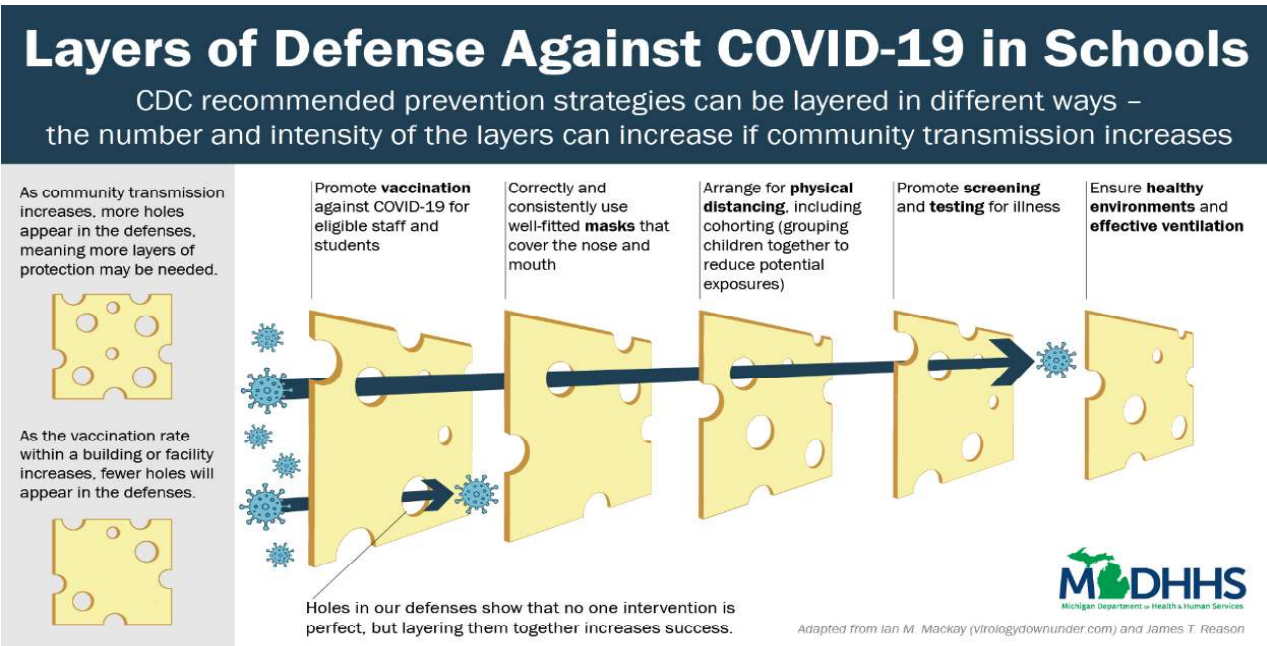
While specific to K-12 schools, these recommendations are also relevant for other sites that serve children—including [child care](#) and After-School Providers.

LAYERING PREVENTION MEASURES

Because the school environment brings together groups of individuals who cannot be fully vaccinated, COVID-19 prevention measures must be adopted to operate schools safely. These strategies can be tailored based on building, district, and community needs. The main goal of implementing prevention measures is to protect students, teachers, and staff, and maintain in-person learning.

The most effective way to prevent transmission within school buildings, reduce disruptions to in-person learning, and help protect people who are not fully vaccinated (including all children under the age of 12 years) is to layer multiple [prevention](#) strategies recommended by the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All prevention strategies provide some level of protection, and layered strategies implemented at the same time provide the greatest level of protection.



[View Layers of Defense Against COVID-19 in Schools online](#)

CDC COVID-19 PREVENTION STRATEGIES

The key strategies recommended by the CDC to keep schools safer are listed in order of effectiveness:

1. **Promoting Vaccination** against COVID-19 [for eligible staff and students](#). Vaccination has proven incredibly effective as the leading public health prevention strategy. Promoting vaccination can help schools more safely maintain in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
2. **Requiring Consistent and Correct Mask Use for all**
 - a) Schools should mandate universal masking for students, staff, teachers and visitors. CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors (age 2 and older), regardless of vaccination status. This prevention strategy is crucial to allowing students to maintain in-person learning.
 - b) Local health departments should work with schools to adopt universal masking policies.
 - c) **Mask use has been proven to substantially reduce transmission in school settings.**
 - d) CDC has recommendations for [proper use of masks](#).
 - e) [CDC's order requires](#) all persons – regardless of vaccination status – to wear masks on public transportation, including school buses.
3. **Physical Distancing** CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by students, teachers, and staff, regardless of vaccination status.

- a) A distance of at least 6 feet is recommended between students and educators, and between educators/staff who are not fully vaccinated.
 - b) Mask use by all students, educators, staff, and visitors is particularly important when physical distance cannot be maintained.
 - c) Because of the importance of in-person learning, schools should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement. When it is not possible to maintain a 3 foot physical distance, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as indoor masking, screening testing, and improved ventilation to help reduce transmission risk.
4. ***Screening Testing*** identifies infected people, including those without symptoms who may be contagious, so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission or outbreaks.
- a) To support schools that incorporate COVID-19 testing into their safer school prevention plans, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is offering rapid antigen testing to Pre-K-12 schools through the [MI Safe Schools Testing Program](#).
5. ***Ventilation***
- a) [Improving ventilation](#) by opening multiple doors and windows, using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.
 - b) Avoiding crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities (e.g., engaging in outdoor activities when possible).
 - c) Open or crack windows in buses and other forms of transportation to improve air circulation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.
6. ***Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette:*** Promoting [handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes](#).
7. ***Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested***
- a) Encouraging students and staff to stay home if sick or having [COVID-19 symptoms](#).
 - b) Encouraging students and staff, regardless of vaccination status, to get tested for COVID-19 if having [symptoms](#) or if they are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19.
8. ***Contact Tracing, in Combination with Quarantine,*** and collaborating with the local health department.
9. ***Cleaning and Disinfection:*** cleaning once a day is usually enough to sufficiently remove potential virus that may be on surfaces. Disinfecting (using disinfectants on the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Disinfectants for COVID-19](#)) removes any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection. CDC has information on routine [cleaning](#) to help maintain healthy facilities.

HOW TO ASSESS RISK

The Delta variant is causing COVID-19 to spread faster across the country and in Michigan. Key indicators of COVID-19 community transmission continue to rise in Michigan including case rates, percent positivity, and hospitalizations. Because of the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant, the rapid rise of cases in Michigan, and some states experiencing the highest level of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations to date, MDHHS recommends that all schools require universal masking and as many prevention layers as feasible this fall.

Together with local public health officials, school administrators should consider multiple factors when they make decisions about implementing layered prevention strategies against COVID-19. Since schools typically serve their surrounding communities, decisions can be based on the school population, families and students served, as well as their communities. Robust layering strategies will consider the following primary factors:

- Level of [community transmission](#) of COVID-19.
- [COVID-19 vaccination coverage](#) in the community and among students, teachers, and staff.
- Use of a frequent SARS-CoV-2 screening testing program for students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated. Testing provides an important layer of prevention, particularly in areas with substantial to high community transmission levels.
- COVID-19 outbreaks or increasing trends in the school or surrounding community.
- Ages of children served in the school and risk associated with school, extracurricular, and social activities.

COVID-19 prevention strategies are critical to protect students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated, especially in areas of moderate-to-high community transmission levels. The CDC recommends using *more* strategies when transmission is *higher*, especially if [vaccination rates](#) are low. Prevention strategies can allow in-person learning to be maintained, even during high levels of transmission in the surrounding community. The most current transmission levels for each county in the United States is available in the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) (as is the percent of the population that is fully vaccinated).

Local health departments will work with schools for additional guidance on prevention strategies if there is an [outbreak](#) in a facility. Some communities may have additional public health requirements as directed by the school administration and/or local health department.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information, please visit the following resources:

- [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools \(aap.org\)](#)