

2021-2022 Catholic School Opening Guidance

Diocese of Saint Cloud

Updated 8.18.21

This Guidance provides a framework for Catholic schools to develop safe and responsive prevention practices that support in-person instruction and activities for PK-12 schools in the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

This prevention strategies have been created based on recommendations by the Minnesota Department of Health, consultation with Minnesota nonpublic school leaders, experts in Minnesota health care networks and specific needs of our parish and school communities.

In support of in-person instruction and activities, the Diocese of Saint Cloud supports layered mitigation strategies that support:

1. keeping COVID-19 infections out of schools
2. preventing spread within school
3. serving the needs of employees, students and families through minimizing disruptions due to exposures, infections and recovery times.

These efforts will require all members of the community to share responsibility and accountability to allow for success and continued building of the Kingdom of God through our educational ministries.

Schools must use this Guidance to develop plans for starting the 2021-2022 school year. All required measures must be followed. Schools may further require any or all of the recommended measures.

Each school's finalized opening plans for the 2021-2022 school year must be shared with the office of the Bishop of the Diocese of Saint Cloud.

This Guidance for planning may be updated as required by mandates or appropriate recommendations by church, public health or government authorities, as warranted by changing conditions with the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes will be communicated with school leaders as soon as possible, through the office of the Bishop.

There are 3 sections of this Guidance:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19 | Page 2 |
| 2. Operational Practices | Page 6 |
| 3. Resources | Page 7 |

This Guidance includes requirements and recommendations:

- **Requirements are presented in bold text** within shaded text boxes.
- Recommendations are presented in standard text.

Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19

Vaccinations

COVID-19 vaccination provides the strongest level of mitigation against COVID-19, preventing serious harm and greatly reducing spread among individuals and communities. People 12 years and older are currently eligible for vaccination.

- **Information regarding the availability of vaccines for eligible groups must be shared with staff and parents in each school.** Schools should strive to provide support to students, families and employees who seek vaccination and may need accommodations to do so.

- Vaccinations are not required for adults and students in diocesan Catholic schools, but are strongly encouraged for those eligible to receive them.
- Vaccinated employees and students are not required to quarantine for close contact exposures.

Recommended sources of information about COVID-19 vaccines are found in the Resources on page 7 of this Guidance.

Face Coverings

For the 2021-2022 school year, MDH and the CDC urge universal indoor masking for all people in PK-12 school settings, regardless of vaccination status.

- School leaders may decide if face coverings will be optional or required of employees, students and visitors.
 - **The basis of the school’s policy must include a regular review of recommendations from MDH, CDC, county public health and consultation with the diocese.**
 - Schools are urged to consider the use of temporary requirements of face coverings during periods of “substantial” or “high” transmission rates of COVID-19. See the CDC tracker link in the Resources on page 7.
 - **The school must communicate clearly and promptly with families upon any changes to policy and practices.**
 - Face covering policies adopted by a school are expected to be consistent for school-day and extracurricular activities and events.
- In close contact situations, students are not required to quarantine if the student with the confirmed infection and the close contact were both wearing properly-fitting masks.

- It is critical that all school programming and activities allow all students to participate without penalty or stigma regarding the use of face coverings. **School employees are responsible for supporting a culture of understanding and respect among themselves, students and parents.** This should be communicated clearly, and regularly as needed.

- **Face coverings are required for all persons when riding district provided or public transportation, in accordance with federal mandates.**

- Face coverings may be required in situations where schools have services provided by staff from a partner school district.

Physical Distancing

Transmission of COVID-19 is significantly reduced through the use of consistent physical distancing practices.

- At least 3 feet of physical distance is recommended in classroom settings, and whenever feasible when students are indoors.
- Schools should continue to use assigned seating arrangements, whenever feasible, to aid any required reporting of cases to MDH or contract tracing needs.
- Use of cohorts or classroom-based seating for school day assemblies, activities and masses is strongly encouraged. Guests and visitors should be limited whenever feasible.

Visitors

- Schools are expected to limit visitors, guests and vendors to those who are a part of essential activities. **All persons who enter the school building must comply with health and safety procedures, including a self-screening for symptoms of illness and exposure to COVID-19.** Unvaccinated visitors are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings.

- **Self-screening information and instructions must be posted at all entrances used by the school for visitors.** A link to printable signs can be found in the Resources on page 7.

- Schools should strive to arrange all visitors by appointment, whenever possible.

Ventilation

- **Schools must ensure that all ventilation systems are operational and support exchanging air in indoor spaces.**

Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

- **Schools must teach and promote routines of proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes).**

Staying Home when Sick and Getting Tested

With the prioritized mitigation strategy of keeping COVID-19 out of schools, it is essential that employees and families are informed about the signs and symptoms of infectious diseases, so they can be proactive in protecting themselves and the community. A public health fact sheet of information, with common symptoms of the COVID-19 disease can be found in the Resources on page 7.

- **Schools must provide self-screening information and instructions to employees and families that includes the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.** It is strongly recommended that any one experiencing such signs and symptoms be tested.

- **Employees or students experiencing signs and symptoms of COVID-19 may not come to school.** It is recommended that they be tested for COVID-19. **They may return to school when symptom-free, and without using medication to reduce symptoms for a minimum of 24 hours.**

- **Employees or students who test negative for COVID-19 may return to school when symptom-free, and without using medication to reduce symptoms for a minimum of 24 hours.**

- **Employees or students who have a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19 may not return to school until all of the following are true:**
 - They feel better. Their cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms have substantially improved.
 - It has been at least 10 days since they first felt sick or tested positive;
 - They have had no fever for at least 24 hours, without using medication that lowers fever.

Sending Sick People Home

- **If a student or employee becomes ill with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they must immediately be sent home, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status or prior history of illness.** While waiting, students should be separated from others and provided a face covering, if not wearing one already.

Reporting Cases, Close Contacts and Quarantines

- **In the event that an employee or student has a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19, schools must [complete a report to MDH](#), in accordance with [Minnesota Rule 4605.7070](#).** The report link is included in the Resources on page 7 as well.

- **To identify potential exposures, the school must gather and review the employee or student's activities during the time they were infectious, two days prior to the date symptoms started, or two days prior to the positive test if no symptoms.** Close contacts include those who were within 6 feet of the infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
 - **In classroom settings, close contacts DO NOT include students who were properly wearing well-fitting masks.**
 - **Household members (siblings, e.g.) attending the school are considered close contacts of the infected person.**

- **Schools must notify any visitors who are identified as close contacts as soon as possible.** It is recommended to advise them to watch for symptoms of COVID-19.

- **Schools must utilize quarantine measures for employee or student close contacts to suppress potential transmission of COVID-19.** This is a critical mitigation strategy for keeping COVID-19 infections out of schools.
 - **Unvaccinated close contacts must quarantine for ONE of the following:**
 - **10 days, if no symptoms develop and no COVID-19 test is pursued**
 - **7 days, if no symptoms develop and the close contact has a negative lab-confirmed (PCR) test no sooner than 5 days after the date of exposure**

- Fully vaccinated persons and those who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days, including household members also in the school, are not required to quarantine, unless they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19. **Schools must verify vaccination status for students or employees in order for them to not be required to quarantine.**
 - This may be accomplished by presentation of a vaccination card to the school. Schools are not required to file copies of vaccination cards, and are expected to maintain confidentiality and discretion with this information.
 - **The vaccinated person must have reached fully vaccinated status at least 14 days prior to the exposure.**

Cleaning and Disinfection

The COVID-19 virus is primarily spread through airborne droplets, but may also be spread through physical contact with surfaces contaminated with the virus.

- It is recommended that schools continue with established disinfecting and cleaning practices of high-traffic, high contact areas at regular intervals throughout each school day. For other areas, a daily cleaning and disinfection is sufficient.

Operational Practices

Most day-to-day activities will resume operational practices consistent with pre-pandemic ones.

- In-person learning should be the standard and focus of educational efforts, with accommodations made for individuals due to reasonable needs, according to school policies. Schools are not expected to provide extensive alternative learning models.
- Lunch service may be resumed in cafeterias or typical designated spaces. Cleaning and disinfection of high contact surfaces should be practiced between groups, whenever possible.
- While the use of cohorts remains a recommended practice, students may again attend special area classes (e.g. phy ed, art, music, science) in those designated spaces. Any appropriate additional cleaning or disinfection of high contact surfaces should be practiced.
- Celebration of school day masses, prayer services or other assemblies may resume as before, however the use of cohorts is recommended. Parishioners or guests who attend such events should continue to be seated separately, whenever possible. Schools should strive to find a balance of including family members in these events, while maintaining practices that allow for safety and follow-through of protocols.
- Services provided through public districts may require protocols that are different than those in Catholic schools.
- Schools are not required to provide remote working arrangements for employees, but are encouraged to support people with reasonable accommodations and needs, whenever possible.
- Extracurricular activities and events are expected to take place much as they did pre-pandemic. Face coverings may be required based on COVID-19 transmission levels in counties, as noted previously in this Guidance.

Resources

Vaccine Information

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

The Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

Vaccines and ethical considerations in light of COVID-19 (Central Minnesota Catholic, Dec 2020)

<https://thecentralminnesotacatholic.org/ask-father-tom-vaccines-and-ethical-considerations-in-light-of-covid-19/>

Tracking COVID-19 transmission rates

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

Reporting and Handling COVID-19 Cases

COVID-19 case reporting form

<https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=KKWLDH3ARC>

MDH Recommendations for Handling a confirmed case of COVID-19

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/casehandle.pdf>

COVID-19 fact sheet for school use

<https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/residents/health-medical/infectious-diseases-fact-sheets/covid-19-provider-technical-fact-sheet.pdf>

COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Settings

Printable signs and posters

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html#posters>

Minnesota Department of Health

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/schoolrecs.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k12-guidance.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

Diocese of Saint Cloud Coronavirus Updates

<https://stcdio.org/coronavirus-update/>