

2021-2022 Catholic School COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan Guidance

Diocese of Saint Cloud

Effective January 1, 2022

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

Our Catholic faith calls us to a fundamental duty of care for one another. In addition to prayer, we are obligated to act in ways that help prevent suffering in our communities, especially among the most vulnerable. While fewer children than adults have become seriously ill with COVID-19 during the pandemic, the virus can and does spread through them. Many families have experienced hardships due to sickness, hospitalizations and deaths in our school and parish communities. **As Catholics, we must acknowledge the calling of our faith to love and protect others by making prudent and responsible choices.**

This Guidance reflects strategies that help prevent the spread of COVID-19. They 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.

Updates to this Guidance reflect strengthening our commitment to protect our schools and surrounding communities from unnecessary harm from COVID-19. **Updates are indicated by bold text in a shaded box.**

New information in this Guidance includes:

- Vaccination availability for ages 5-11 (page 3)
- Universal face covering option for limiting the need to quarantine close contacts (page 3)
- Visitor policy (page 4)
- Close contacts (page 5)
- Utilizing rapid testing options to shorten quarantine periods (page 6)
- Operational practices (page 7)
- Resource links (page 8)

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

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

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

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:

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| 1. Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19 | Page 3 |
| 2. Operational Practices | Page 7 |
| 3. Resources | Page 8 |

This Guidance includes requirements and recommendations:

- Requirements are presented in boxes.

- Recommendations are presented with bullet points, in standard text.

Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19

Vaccinations

UPDATED: COVID-19 vaccination provides the strongest level of mitigation against COVID-19, preventing serious harm and greatly reducing spread among individuals and communities. **Pope Francis has called vaccination against COVID-19 an “act of love” for self, family, friends and others. Persons ages 5 and up 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. *Information about COVID-19 vaccines is provided on page 8 of this Guidance.*
- Vaccinations are not required for adults and students in diocesan Catholic schools. Parents with medical questions or concerns about vaccines should be encouraged to consult with their physicians.
- Vaccinated employees and students are not required to quarantine for close contact exposures.

Face Coverings

UPDATED: For the 2021-2022 school year, schools are urged to require universal indoor masking for all persons, regardless of vaccination status.

Schools must choose ONE of two approaches with face coverings:

Approach A: Universal Indoor Face Covering Option

- All persons are **required** to wear a properly fitting cloth or disposable face mask (not face shields) over the nose and mouth while indoors.
 - Masks must be worn at all times except during meals.
 - During meals, schools must allow for distancing to reduce potential transmission of COVID-19
- In the event of a known infection among a student, employee, volunteer, guest or other person in the school building, quarantines for close contacts are **NOT** required, if:
 - The infected person and the close contact(s) were properly masked
 - The close contact has no symptoms consistent with COVID-19

Approach B: Recommended Indoor Face Coverings

- Students and employees, volunteers and guests are encouraged to wear a properly fitting cloth mask while indoors.
- **Quarantine periods are required for close contacts of infected persons, as detailed on pages 5 and 6 of this Guidance.**

- 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 contact tracing needs.
- Use of cohorts or classroom-based seating for school day assemblies, activities and masses is strongly encouraged.

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.
- **UPDATED: If using Approach A: Universal Face Covering Requirement, all visitors must comply.**

- 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 8.*

- 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 8.

- 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 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 8.
- **UPDATED: In the event of an infection of a person in a student's or employee's household (parent, non-attending sibling, spouse, e.g.), the student or employee is considered a close contact.**

- To identify potential exposures, the school must gather and review the employee's 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.
 - **UPDATED: In classroom settings, close contacts DO NOT include students who were properly wearing well-fitting masks.**
 - **This applies to ALL students if using Approach A: Universal masking**
 - **This ONLY applies to students where both the infected and close contact were BOTH properly wearing masks if using Approach B: Recommended masking**
 - 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 limiting the spread of COVID-19.
 - Unvaccinated close contacts must quarantine for ONE of the following:
 - 10 days, if no symptoms develop and no COVID-19 test is pursued, resuming activities on day 11
 - 7 days, if no symptoms develop and the close contact has a negative lab-confirmed single test (NAAT, PCR) no sooner than 5 days after the date of exposure, resuming activities on day 8
 - **UPDATED: 7 days, if no symptoms develop and the close contact has a sequence of two negative rapid antigen tests (BinaxNow or BD Veritor)**
 - **Tests must be administered correctly, with instructions and guidance provided by the school**
 - **Tests should be completed on days 5 and 7 from the last exposure to resume activities on day 8**

- 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

- 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.

- **UPDATED:** Lunch service may take place in cafeterias or typical designated spaces or classrooms. Cleaning and disinfection of high contact surfaces should be practiced between groups, whenever possible.

- **If using Approach A: Universal Face Covering Requirement, students should be distanced during meals to reduce possible transmission while not wearing a face covering.**

- 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.

- **UPDATED: Extracurricular activities and events should be undertaken with precautions consistent with those in place during the school day.**

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/>

UPDATED: Pope Francis' remarks on COVID-19 on August 18, 2021

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-appeal-covid-19-vaccines-act-of-love.html>

Tracking COVID-19 transmission rates

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

Reporting and Handling COVID-19 Cases

UPDATED: COVID-19 case reporting form

<https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=YLH94XW7YKD9WDE9>

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/k-12-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/>