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MDHHS issues updated COVID-19 school guidance to help keep kids and educators healthy

LANSING, Mich. - Today, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) issued [updated recommendations for schools](#) designed to help prevent transmission of COVID-19 within school buildings, reduce disruptions to in-person learning and help protect vulnerable individuals and individuals who are not fully vaccinated.

The guidance has been updated to reflect the most current recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on masking and prevention strategies to help operate schools more safely. It includes guidance on assessing risk levels when making decisions about implementing layered prevention strategies against COVID-19.

“We are committed to ensuring Michigan students and educators are safe in the classroom, including those who may not yet be vaccinated,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. “MDHHS is issuing this guidance to help protect Michiganders of all ages. We continue to urge all eligible residents to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible as it is our best defense against the virus and the way we are going to end this pandemic.”

“Our students and staff need to be in schools as much as possible this year,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. “Following the informed guidance from national and state health experts will help keep our students and staff healthy and help maximize student learning.”

Prevention Strategies

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 is to layer multiple [prevention](#) strategies recommended by CDC. All prevention strategies provide some level of protection, and layered strategies implemented at the same time provide the greatest level of protection.

The key strategies recommended by the CDC to keep schools safer are as follows:

1. ***Promoting vaccination*** against COVID-19 [for eligible staff and students](#).
Vaccination has proven incredibly effective as the leading public health prevention strategy.

2. **Consistent and correct mask use**
 - a) CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all educators, staff, students and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.
 - b) CDC has recommendations for proper use of masks.
 - c) CDC's order requires all persons – regardless of vaccination status – wear masks on public transportation, including school buses.
3. **Physical distancing** CDC recommends schools maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by students, teachers and staff, regardless of vaccination status. When it is not possible to maintain a three-foot physical distance, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as indoor masking, screening testing, cohorting, 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.
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:** 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 COVID-19 webpage) 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.

The following factors should be used when determining mitigation strategies:

- 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.
- 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.

To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine
For more information about COVID-19 in Michigan, visit Michigan.gov/coronavirus.

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