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## **MDHHS updates school guidance and strongly recommends universal masking to prevent the spread of COVID-19**

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. 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 keep kids, staff and families safe.

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. Mask use has been proven to substantially reduce transmission in school settings.

"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."

MDHHS recommends that all schools adopt policies to:

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

The key strategies recommended by the CDC to keep schools safer are outlined below:

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 to schools, 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 COVID-19](#) list) 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.

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.

To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit [Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine](https://Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine).

For more information about COVID-19 in Michigan, visit [Michigan.gov/coronavirus](https://Michigan.gov/coronavirus).

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