



# **NEWS RELEASE**

## **STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER**

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### **MDHHS Guidance Encourages Schools to Safely Offer In-Person Instruction Michigan's Children Need to Succeed**

*Goal is for all Michigan school districts to offer in-person learning option March 1 or sooner*

**LANSING, MICH.** – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) announced new guidance for schools today to keep students, staff and communities safe during the COVID-19 pandemic while providing the in-person instruction that is crucial to learning and development.

The state's goal is to have all Michigan school districts offer an in-person learning option for students no later than March 1, and earlier if possible.

Guidance emphasizes use of scientifically proven methods of reducing the risk of COVID-19 spread, include wearing masks, ventilation improvements, frequent hand washing and social distancing.

Vaccination of teachers and other school staff will begin by Jan. 11 due to educators' roles as essential frontline workers.

"MDHHS will continue to do what it takes to save lives and limit the spread of COVID-19," said Director Robert Gordon. "At the same time, in-person instruction is critical for the current and the future well-being of children, especially young learners and students who are disadvantaged. We encourage schools to reopen as soon as they can do so with proven protections for staff and students."

"The value of in-person learning for our kids is immeasurable, and we must do everything we can to help them get a great education safely," said Gov. Whitmer. "Over the last 10 months, medical experts and epidemiologists have closely followed the data and have learned that schools can establish a low risk of transmission by ensuring that everyone wears a mask and adopting careful infection prevention protocols. I also announced this week that educators and support staff will be eligible for the next phase of COVID vaccinations beginning Jan. 11 to help protect them and their families as they return to work. I strongly encourage districts to provide as much face-to-face learning as possible, and my administration will work closely with them to get it done."

Guidance is for grades pre-kindergarten through 12 and includes early childhood education, such as Head Start and Great Start Readiness Program.

Drawing on evidence from Michigan, the United States, and countries around the world, the guidance document outlines specific infection control measures that have worked in schools during the pandemic.

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Wearing masks is especially important for controlling COVID-19 transmission and masks should be worn inside schools by all staff and students, except during meals and in other limited circumstances. Face masks may be made of cloth or may be disposable surgical-style masks.

Other infection control measures in the new MDHHS guidance include:

- When feasible, assigning children to cohort groups and limiting their interactions to their cohorts to reduce the number of contacts.
- Keeping children 6 feet apart from one another to the extent feasible, making creative use of school spaces to facilitate distancing.
- Providing adequate hand sanitizing supplies and reinforcing proper handwashing techniques.
- Improving air ventilation.
- Having staff and students conduct self-screenings for symptoms at home every day before going to school.
- Ensuring school plans are in place in coordination with their local health department if there are any positive COVID-19 tests.
- Having staff and students who either test positive or are close contacts of those who test positive follow the [guidance issued by MDHHS](#) as well as local health departments. Anyone who is considered a close contact of someone who tests positive but does not have symptoms should quarantine for 10 days under CDC guidance.

Additional recommendations can be found in the State of Michigan Guidelines for Operating Schools Safely on Michigan's [Schools COVID Testing website](#).

In November, MDHHS paused in-person learning in high schools as part of an order to limit indoor gatherings to address an alarming increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths and in hospital occupancy rates.

After case numbers decreased, high schools were permitted to resume in-person classes effective Dec. 21.

The guidance is subject to change. Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://Michigan.gov/Coronavirus) and [CDC.gov/Coronavirus](https://CDC.gov/Coronavirus).

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