



# COUNTY OF BUCKS

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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**DAVID C. DAMSKER, M.D., M.P.H.**

August 23, 2021

The Bucks County Health Department (BCHD) wants our schools to be safe, healthy, open, and able to provide a quality in-person education. Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we know students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority. Effective immediately, the BCHD will issue COVID-19 mitigation recommendations consistent with CDC and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH).

Pursuant to clarification sent by Pennsylvania's Acting Secretary of Health Alison V. Beam, JD, the BCHD makes the following recommendations to Bucks County schools, based on current transmission levels in Bucks County. While much of our previous guidance was in sync with the CDC, this guidance will serve to strengthen that connection. Please note, what follows is only a summary of key points from the CDC. The full set of CDC and PADOH guidance can be found at these links [CDC](#) and [PADOH](#), respectively. The following recommendations replace previously issued BCHD school guidance.

#### VACCINES

- All eligible individuals 12 years of age and older should get vaccinated.
- School districts should consider mandating vaccination for all school staff and teachers, a position supported by the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers.

#### MASKS/FACE COVERINGS

- All individuals (students, teachers, staff, visitors) should wear masks in schools K-12 to begin the school year regardless of vaccination status.
- Individuals do not need to wear masks when outdoors.
- Per the CDC order on wearing masks on public transportation, regardless of the school mask policy, masks are required to be worn by passengers and drivers on school buses.

#### PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- The CDC recommends maintaining at least 3 feet of physical distance between students in classrooms, with additional layered mitigation efforts employed if distance recommendations would prevent a school from fully reopening.

#### TESTING

- Any individuals who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should be referred for COVID-19 testing.

#### ISOLATION/QUARANTINE

- Whether symptomatic or asymptomatic, any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days as both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can transmit the virus during that time.

## **REPORTING**

- Parents should report positive COVID-19 cases to schools. Schools are required to report cases to the BCHD.

## **CONTACT TRACING**

- Per the PADOH, schools should continue to work closely with BCHD to complete contact tracing for individuals diagnosed or exposed to COVID-19. As part of the contact tracing process, the PADOH and BCHD will continue to work with schools to gather information about potential close contacts.
- CDC guidance adds the following exception to the definition of close contact:
  - In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where:
    - both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks; and
    - other K–12 school prevention strategies (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the K–12 school setting.
    - This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.

## **SPORTS AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

- Per CDC guidance, individuals who are fully vaccinated no longer need to wear masks or physically distance when participating in sports and extracurricular activities.
- CDC recommends K-12 schools implement prevention strategies, including masking and physical distancing, during sports and extracurricular activities for participants who are not fully vaccinated.

## **OTHER MITIGATION PRACTICES**

- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are also important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.