

State of Illinois Adopts New CDC COVID-19 Guidelines For K-12 Schools and Early Education

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SPRINGFIELD – With new guidance from the CDC that addresses the need to keep students in classrooms while protecting residents from COVID-19, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is adopting new [operational guidance for schools and early education from the CDC](#) that eases some restrictions while maintaining a core set of infectious disease prevention

strategies as part of their normal operations. The new guidelines drop the requirement for quarantines and ease physical distancing rules.

Schools are still encouraged to follow the CDC's new operational guidance on best practices for all infectious diseases and keep students home if they are ill, and use testing to confirm or rule out COVID-19 and other infections. Schools must also continue to provide remote learning to any student who is under isolation for COVID-19 based on the State Superintendent's Remote Learning Declaration.

"Current conditions of the pandemic are very different from those of the last two years, with many available tools to protect the general public, including the widespread availability of vaccines for everyone 6 months and older. On top of that, we've always prioritized hospital capacity, and hospitals are not facing the kind of strain we saw during earlier COVID-19 waves," said IDPH Director Sameer Vohra. "We want all Illinois residents to continue to remain safe and use all available tools to protect themselves and their families from acquiring COVID-19. Vaccination continues to be the single strongest tool in our toolbox to contain the virus and protect people from the most serious outcomes. It is never too late to get up to date."

"This updated guidance from the CDC acknowledges the importance of in-person learning by allowing schools to more aptly adjust to changes within their own communities," said State Superintendent of Education Carmen Ayala. "Administrators can have more flexibility to be able to make the necessary adjustments they need to maintain consistent in-person learning."

The new CDC guidance notes that although COVID-19 continues to circulate, the risk of severe illness has been reduced due to high levels of vaccinations and infection-induced immunity, along with the widespread availability of effective treatments and prevention tools. This allows the CDC to minimize public health interventions and reduce barriers to social and educational activities. However, it remains critically important for those at risk of severe health outcomes to be aware of their risk and to take steps to fully protect themselves with vaccines and booster shots, and other protective measures.

The new CDC guidance builds on the framework [for monitoring the community level of COVID-19](#) released in February that looks at data for hospitalizations, hospital capacity, and cases. The approach focuses on minimizing severe disease, limiting the strain on the healthcare system, and enabling those at the highest risk to protect themselves against infection and severe disease.

The updated CDC guidance for schools continues to recommend strategies for everyday operations that prevent the spread of Covid-19 and other infectious disease. The following strategies should be in place at all Community Levels:

- Promote staying up to date with all routine vaccinations
- Implement policies that encourage students and staff to stay home when sick
- Optimize ventilation systems
- Reinforce proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Utilize proper cleaning and disinfection procedures

The CDC school guidance continues to recommend universal masking when community levels are high and screening testing for high-risk activities (e.g., close contact sports or band) or during key times in the year (e.g., prom or return from breaks). Monitoring community levels can help schools and local health departments, as well as individuals, make decisions based on their local context and their unique needs.

Schools, with help from local health departments, should consider the local context when selecting strategies to prioritize for implementation. Schools should balance the risk of COVID-19 with educational, social, and mental health outcomes when deciding which prevention strategies to put in place.

For more information on the new CDC guidelines for K-12 schools and early care education, click [HERE](#).