

This guidance document is being provided based on the public health situation as we understand it today and is intended to support school systems in planning for school year 2020-2021 activities and instruction beginning August 1, 2020. Changes to the public health situation over the course of the summer may necessitate changes to this guidance, including additional restrictions to school operations.

This guidance addresses:

- On campus and virtual instruction
- Administrative activities by teachers, staff, or students that occur on school campuses or virtually
- Extracurricular sports and activities
- Any other activities that teachers, staff, or students must complete that cannot be accomplished virtually
- Visits by parents and the general public

It is recommended that after-school providers and other programs that operate in conjunction with campuses follow this guidance in coordination with the campus(es) they serve.

Previously issued summer school guidance continues to apply through July 31, 2020, or until the first day of instruction for the new school year, if it is prior to August 1. In the event the local school system school year 2020-2021 begins prior to August 1, then this guidance is effective the first day of instruction for that school year.

## Public Health Considerations

The virus that causes COVID-19 can infect people of all ages, and school system leaders should do everything feasible to keep students safe. That said, research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), among others, has found that while children do get infected by COVID-19 and some severe outcomes have been reported in children, relatively few children with COVID-19 are hospitalized or have severe symptoms.

That being said, a child with a mild or even asymptomatic case of COVID-19 can spread the infection to others. The same is true for adults. Even if an infected person is only mildly ill, the people they spread it to may become seriously ill or even die, especially if that person is 65 or older with pre-existing health conditions that place them at higher risk.

While it is not possible to eliminate all risk of furthering the spread of COVID-19, the current science suggests there are many steps schools can take to reduce the risks to students, teachers, staff, and their families significantly. This guidance document contains information on four sets of practices

that minimize the likelihood of viral spread, including some that are requirements for all schools and others that are recommendations:<sup>i</sup>

- PROVIDE NOTICE: Requirements for parental and public notices
- PREVENT: Recommended practices to prevent the virus from entering the school
- RESPOND: Required practices to respond to a lab-confirmed case in the school
- MITIGATE: Recommended practices to mitigate likelihood of spread inside the school

The prevention and mitigation practices recommended in this document are designed to significantly reduce the likelihood that a coronavirus outbreak occurs on campus. School systems should take their local public health context into account throughout the year as they determine which of the prevention and mitigation recommendations they implement. Systems operating in regions with higher rates of COVID-19 spread should apply recommendations more stringently than those with very few or no cases in their regions. Additionally, systems should consider stringently applying prevention and mitigation recommendations to adults on campuses, even when it might not be feasible to do so for students. Consistently implementing recommendations to the extent feasible is the best way to reduce the potential negative impact of infection on students' educational experiences.

There will almost certainly be situations that necessitate temporary school closure due to positive COVID-19 cases in schools. Parents, educators, and school administrators should be prepared for this in the event that it occurs, while actively working to prevent it through prevention and mitigation practices.

### **PROVIDE NOTICE: Parental and Public Notices**

#### **Developing a Plan for On-Campus Activities and Instruction**

School systems must post for parents and the general public, one week prior to the start of on-campus activities and instruction, a summary of the plan they will follow to mitigate COVID-19 spread in their schools based on the requirements and recommendations outlined here. This summary document can follow any format the school system deems appropriate to communicate the information, should broadly address the major points in this guidance, and must be posted on the school system homepage or another easily found area on the system website. Neither this summary document nor any local school systems' reopening plans are subject to approval by any government entity.

It is recommended that, within this summary, school systems designate a staff person or group that is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and clearly communicate for all school staff and families who this person or group is and how to contact them.

#### **Attendance and Enrollment**

1. Per Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.092, students must attend 90% of a course (with some exceptions) in order to be awarded credit for the course and/or to be promoted to the next grade. This requirement remains in force during the 2020-21 school year.

2. Given the public health situation, student attendance may be earned through the delivery of virtual instruction.
3. Any parent may request that their student be offered virtual instruction from any school system that offers such instruction.
4. School systems are required to provide parents a notice of their public education enrollment and attendance rights and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic using a document published by TEA.

## **PREVENT: Practices to Prevent the Virus from Entering the School**

### *Screening Questions for COVID-19 Before Campus Access*

1. School systems should require teachers and staff to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms before coming onto campus each day. Symptoms are listed at the end of this document. The self-screening should include teachers and staff taking their own temperature. Teachers and staff would report to the school system if: (a) they have come into close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19; or (b) they themselves have COVID-19 symptoms.
2. Before coming onto campus or buses at the beginning of the year and at the start of every week of on-campus instruction, school systems should screen all students to determine if: (a) they have the COVID-19 symptoms listed in this document; or (b) they have had close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19. Screening is accomplished by asking questions by phone or other electronic methods and/or in person. The screening questions should also be asked of a student's parent if that parent will be dropping off or picking up their child from inside the school. Regularly performing a forehead temperature check of otherwise asymptomatic students in school is not recommended, but the practice is also not prohibited by this guidance.
3. Excluding parental drop-off and pick-up as discussed above, before visitors are allowed onto campuses, school systems should screen all visitors to determine if: (a) they have COVID-19 symptoms listed in this document; or (b) they have had close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19. When practical, screening questions could be supplemented with temperature checks of adults.
4. School systems are permitted to prevent any individual who fails the screening criteria from being admitted to the campus or a bus until they meet any of the criteria for re-entry to the campus, as described below.

### *Individuals Confirmed, Suspected, or Exposed to COVID-19*

1. Any individuals—including teachers, staff, students, or other campus visitors—who **themselves** either: (a) are lab-confirmed to have COVID-19; or (b) experience the symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) must stay at home throughout the infection period, and cannot return to campus until the school system screens the individual to determine any of the below conditions for campus re-entry have been met:
  - In the case of an individual who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to school when all three of the following criteria are met:
    - i. at least three days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications);

- ii. the individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
    - iii. at least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
  - In the case of an individual who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, such individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.
  - If the individual has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either (a) obtain a medical professional’s note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis or (b) receive two separate confirmations at least 24 hours apart that they are free of COVID via acute infection tests at an approved COVID-19 testing location found at <https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/>.
2. Individuals—including students, teachers, staff, or other campus visitors—who **have had close contact with someone** who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19, as narrowly defined in this document and as determined by the appropriate public health agency, should stay at home through the 14-day incubation period, and should not be allowed on campus.
- School systems should screen individuals after the incubation period has concluded, and if the individual did not experience COVID-19 symptoms during that period, the individual can be allowed back on campus. If the individual experienced symptoms, they must stay at home until the conditions outlined above have been met.

#### *Identifying Possible COVID-19 Cases on Campus*

- Schools must immediately separate any student who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school until the student can be picked up by a parent or guardian.
- Schools should clean the areas used by the individual who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school (student, teacher, or staff) as soon as is feasible.
- Students who report feeling feverish should be given an immediate temperature check to determine if they are symptomatic for COVID-19.

### **RESPOND: Practices to Respond to a Lab-Confirmed Case in the School**

#### *Required Actions if Individuals with Lab-Confirmed Cases Have Been in a School*

1. If an individual who has been in a school is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must notify its [local health department](#), in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, including confidentiality requirements of the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
2. Schools must close off areas that are heavily used by the individual with the lab-confirmed case (student, teacher, or staff) until the non-porous surfaces in those areas can be disinfected, unless more than 3 days have already passed since that person was on campus.
3. Consistent with school notification requirements for other communicable diseases, and consistent with legal confidentiality requirements, schools must notify all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-confirmed COVID-19 case is identified among students, teachers or staff who participate on any on campus activities.

## **MITIGATE: Practices to Mitigate the Likelihood of COVID-19 Spread Inside the School**

### **Operational Considerations:**

#### *Health and Hygiene Practices: General*

1. Schools should attempt to have hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations with soap and water at each entrance. They should also attempt to provide hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations with soap and water in every classroom.
2. Students, teachers, staff, and campus visitors should be encouraged to sanitize and/or wash hands frequently.
  - School systems are encouraged to have students engage in supervised handwashing for at least 20 seconds at least two times each day, in addition to being encouraged to wash hands after using the restroom and before eating.
  - School systems are encouraged to teach students good handwashing techniques.
  - Students, teachers, staff, and campus visitors should be encouraged to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and if not available, covered in their elbows. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash, hands should be washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or hand sanitizer should be used.
3. Campuses should institute more frequent cleaning practices, including additional cleaning by janitorial staff, as well as provide the opportunity for children to clean their own spaces before and after they are used, in ways that are safe and developmentally appropriate.
  - Schools should arrange for additional cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched in common throughout the day. This would include objects such as door handles, common tables/desks, shared supplies such as art supplies, and high touch devices such as shared laptops or tablets.
  - Schools should arrange for cleaning of commonly-touched surfaces in classrooms between different class groups, if the same room will be used by multiple class groups.
  - The CDC has provided [guidance on cleaning community buildings](#) to prevent COVID-19 spread.
  - Schools should ensure these products are stored safely, including storing harmful products where children cannot access them, and ensuring that harmful cleaning products are not used near children.
4. Whenever possible, schools should open windows or otherwise work to improve air flow by allowing outside air to circulate in the building.
5. If a building has remained dormant for an extended period, we recommend you review [CDC guidance on maintaining water system safety](#) when buildings are unused for extended periods of time, and apply this guidance as appropriate.
6. The CDC provides a range of [printed resources](#) such as posters that promote protective measures and can serve as helpful reminders of best practices. Schools may use these or may create their own reminders.
7. On the first day of school, school systems must provide instruction to students on appropriate hygiene practices consistent with the mitigation practices adopted in the local school system.

### *Health and Hygiene Practices: Masks*

1. For the purposes of this document, masks include non-medical grade disposable face masks, cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth), or full-face shields to protect eyes, nose, and mouth. Face shields may be superior to cloth face coverings in many circumstances, given improved ability to see mouth movements and improved air circulation.
2. Consistent with the actions taken by many organizations across the state, consider having all employees and visitors wear masks or face shields. This could be especially important where staff congregate in relatively close settings, for example, during staff meetings or in employee break rooms, or where visitors may congregate.
3. Similarly, consider having students for whom it is developmentally appropriate wear masks or face shields at times when they will be in close proximity to other students for an extended period (i.e., when they would otherwise meet the definition of a close contact).
4. Young children and persons who are unable to adjust or remove masks should not be regarded as suitable candidates for wearing masks or face shields.
  - It is not developmentally appropriate for students in kindergarten and below to wear masks.
  - It may not be developmentally appropriate for some other students, including some students with disabilities, to wear masks.
  - For students in first grade and above, the determination of whether wearing a mask is developmentally appropriate is up to the student's parent or guardian.

### *Student-Teacher Groupings*

Where feasible without disrupting the educational experience, encourage students to practice social distancing.

1. In classroom spaces that allow it, consider placing student desks a minimum of six feet apart when possible.
2. In classrooms where students are regularly within six feet of one another, schools should plan for more frequent hand washing and/or hand sanitizing and should consider whether increased airflow from the outdoors is possible.

### *Use of Non-Classroom Spaces*

1. When feasible and appropriate (for example, in physical education classes as weather permits), it is preferable for students to gather outside, rather than inside, because of likely reduced risk of virus spread outdoors.
2. Participation in extracurricular activities on campus must align with UIL and non-UIL activities guidance. UIL guidance can be found on the [UIL website](#) and non-UIL guidance can be found in the [Closure Guidance](#) section of the TEA coronavirus website.
3. As is the case in typical years, school systems with policies that allow it may open facilities to the public. Operation of the facilities should be done consistent with governor's executive orders for similar activities.
4. Campuses should plan for entry, exit, and transition procedures that reduce large group gatherings (of students and/or adults) in close proximity. Consider staggering school start and end times, assigning students to entries to ensure even distribution of students entering/exiting at each door, providing guidance to students to enter one at a time and wait

six feet apart outside the entrance, and, where appropriate, encouraging parents to remain outside during drop-off and pick-up.

5. Consider adding dividers between bathroom sinks, especially when students cannot be at least six feet apart while using the sinks.
6. School systems should consider practices that reduce the likelihood that students meet the close contact definition (defined below) at lunch. This could include having students eat lunch at their desks. It could include the use of seats that are spaced at least 6 feet apart. It could include the use of dividers on cafeteria tables if they can serve the purpose of shielding the students from respiratory droplets with which they might otherwise come into contact. For meal service itself, consider individually plated meals with disposable food service items for students who do not bring their own lunch.

### *Transportation Recommendations*

1. School systems should consider requiring students and staff to use hand sanitizer upon boarding the bus.
2. For bus routes where students need to sit in close proximity within the bus, consider having all students for whom it is developmentally appropriate wear masks or face shields while on a bus.
3. When possible, schools should open windows to allow outside air to circulate in the bus.
4. School systems should encourage families to drop students off, carpool, or walk with their student to school to reduce possible virus exposure on buses.
5. Buses should be thoroughly cleaned after each bus trip, focusing on high-touch surfaces such as bus seats, steering wheels, knobs, and door handles. During cleaning, open windows to allow for additional ventilation and air flow.

### *Visits to Schools*

- Parents and other adults can visit schools, as permitted by local school system policies. During these visits, parents and other visitors must follow virus prevention and mitigation requirements of the school.
- Schools systems should restrict visits in schools to only those essential to school operations.

### *Staffing*

1. Employees of school systems, like employees of any organization, must continue to meet the work expectations set by their employers, subject to any applicable employment contract terms.
2. School teachers and staff should be trained specifically on the protocols outlined in this document and the practices adopted by their school system. Additionally, while not developed with this exact guidance in mind, Texas Agri-Life Extension offers a free online course on [Special Considerations for Infection Control During COVID-19](#) (2hrs). This course is intended for frontline childcare workers, but the principles of the course apply equally to those working in school settings.
3. School systems should attempt to reduce in-person staff meetings or other opportunities for adults to congregate in close settings. When those meetings are necessary, consider the use of masks or dividers, and schools should also consider whether increased airflow from the outdoors is possible in those settings.

## **COVID-19 Symptoms**

In evaluating whether an individual has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, consider the following questions:

Have they recently begun experiencing any of the following in a way that is not normal for them?

- Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Loss of taste or smell
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Shaking or exaggerated shivering
- Significant muscle pain or ache
- Diarrhea

## **Close Contact**

This document refers to “close contact” with an individual who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19. Close contact is determined by an appropriate public health agency. For clarity, close contact is defined as:

- a. being directly exposed to infectious secretions (e.g., being coughed on while not wearing a mask or face shield); or
- b. being within 6 feet for a cumulative duration of 15 minutes, while not wearing a mask or face shield;

if either occurred at any time in the last 14 days at the same time the infected individual was infectious.

Individuals are presumed infectious at least two days prior to symptom onset or, in the case of asymptomatic individuals who are lab-confirmed with COVID-19, two days prior to the confirming lab test.

## ***Screening Questionnaire Information***

1. When asking individuals if they have symptoms for COVID-19, school systems must only require the individual to provide a “Yes” or “No” to the overall statement that they are symptomatic for COVID-19, as opposed to asking the individual for specific symptom confirmation. School systems are not entitled to collect information during screening on the specific health information of an individual beyond that they are symptomatic.



2. Once it is determined that individuals who responded “Yes” to either of these questions have met the criteria for re-entry, school systems must destroy those individuals’ responses.

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<sup>i</sup> Within sections that primarily contain requirements, there are some recommended practices (indicated with “should”). Likewise, within sections that primarily contain recommendations, there are some required practices (indicated with “must”).