

Berrien County Return to Learn Interim Guidance Brief for 2021-2022 School Year

Updated July 11, 2021

Intended Audiences: School Leaders and Administrators

Whereas in-person learning has been shown to provide the greatest benefit to community youth, and where ensuring this can happen consistently and safely during the upcoming school year has been deemed a priority of public health and education partners.

Through ongoing partnership of public health and education partners, the following guidance is meant to support school districts in planning for a successful return to the classroom this fall and to ensure that COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures are implemented in a way that fosters optimal learning environments while simultaneously ensuring health and safety for the overarching school-district community (students and staff alike).

This interim guidance is based on current data, trends and knowledge about SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). At this time we know there to be minimal impact to youth from COVID-19. Guidance may change and evolve as knowledge changes surrounding current and potential variants and availability of vaccination for younger age groups.

Monitoring Community Transmission & COVID-19 Activity:

Local public health will provide ongoing monitoring of community transmission in Berrien County and the surrounding region. This activity will allow the Berrien County Health Department (BCHD) to support school superintendents and administrators in making informed and educated decisions that are best for school operations, students and staff. BCHD will provide updates and adjust recommendations based on the CDC's predesignated indicators and thresholds for [community transmission of COVID-19](#).

Table 1. CDC Indicators and Thresholds for Community Transmission of COVID-19¹

Indicator	Low Transmission Blue	Moderate Transmission Yellow	Substantial Transmission Orange	High Transmission Red
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days ²	0-9	10-49	50-99	≥100
Percentage of NAATs that are positive during the past 7 days ³	<5.0%	5.0%-7.9%	8.0%-9.9%	≥10.0%

¹If the two indicators suggest different levels, the actions corresponding to the higher threshold should be chosen. County-level data on total new cases in the past 7 days and test percent positivity are available on the County View tab in [CDC's COVID Data Tracker](#).

²Total number of new cases per 100,000 persons within the last 7 days is calculated by adding the number of new cases in the county (or other community type) in the last 7 days divided by the population in the county (or other community type) and multiplying by 100,000.

³Percentage of positive diagnostic and screening NAATs during the last 7 days is calculated by dividing the number of positive tests in the county (or other administrative level) during the last 7 days by the total number of tests resulted over the last 7 days. Additional information can be found on the [Calculating Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 \(SARS-CoV-2\) Laboratory Test Percent Positivity: CDC Methods and Considerations for Comparisons and Interpretation](#) webpage.

Local Guidance for Implementation of COVID-19 Prevention Strategies

The following list are the overarching prevention strategies recommended for prevention of COVID-19 transmission in the school setting:

- Exclusion due to Illness (**Staying home when sick**)
- Promoting Vaccination
- Consistent & Correct Mask Use
- Physical Distancing/ Cohorting
- Screening Testing
- Ventilation
- Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette
- Contact tracing paired with isolation & quarantine
- Cleaning & Disinfecting

BCHD advises schools to implement these prevention strategies in a layered and measured approach. Layering multiple strategies provides increased safety and protection for staff and students and by being able to increase prevention strategies based on community transmission allows schools to remain agile and poised to maintain a safe and healthy environment in the event that community transmission increases or a new variant strain emerges that poses greater risk or causes more severe illness among children. The following table provides guidance and recommendations on how a school may consider implementing prevention strategies.

COVID-19 Prevention Strategies	CDC Indicators and Thresholds for Community Transmission of COVID-19			
	Low	Moderate	Substantial	High
1) Promote Vaccination for eligible staff & students	x	x	x	x
Face Mask*				
2a) Unvaccinated students and staff wear face masks indoors			x	x
2b) All students and staff wear face masks indoors				x
3) Physical distancing where possible		x	x	x
3a) Cohorting loosely (e.g. meals in cafeteria, etc...)		x		
3b) Cohorting strictly (e.g. meals in classrooms, etc...)			x	x
Screening, Testing, and Contact Tracing				
4a) Exclude students and staff if sick	x	x	x	x
4b) Encourage symptomatic students and staff or those exposed to a positive person to be tested for COVID-19	x	x	x	x
4c) Conduct screening testing of students				x
4d) Implement contact tracing and quarantine in collaboration with BCHD	x	x	x	x
Maintaining Healthy Environments				
5a) Promote handwashing and cough/sneeze hygiene	x	x	x	x
5b) Routine cleaning to focus primarily on high touch surfaces		x	x	x
5b) Increase in thoroughness & frequency of cleaning			x	x
5c) Avoid crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities			x	x

***Face Masks** must be worn during school supported transportation. CDC order applies to all public transportation inclusive of conveyance by school bus; face masks must be worn by all buses operated by public and private school systems. Additionally, schools may choose universal masking for threshold(s) that note unvaccinated if needed to support appropriate implementation and compliance.

Example Implementation of Above Guidance & Recommendations for School Activities & Functions

The following is for example purposes only, but may provide ideas for implementation, clarity for recommended activities at corresponding community transmission thresholds, and guidance for application to unique school district operations.

School districts should consider the make-up of their personnel and student bodies when making final decisions for implementation. Consideration should be given to current vaccination status, vulnerability of populations served, abilities to consistently support and integrate prevention strategies.

School Activities/Functions	CDC Indicators and Thresholds for Community Transmission of COVID-19			
	Low Transmission	Moderate Transmission	Substantial Transmission	High Transmission
Curriculum Instruction Format	In-person Instruction Supported as Primary	In-person Instruction Supported as Primary	In-person Instruction Supported; may encompass remote instruction in isolated classrooms and/or buildings	Impact to whole buildings/district may be experienced; transitioning to remote instruction. Continue to prioritize in-person as able with guidance from public health.
Face Masks	Face masks not required. Recommended for unvaccinated and/or immunocompromised	Face masks not required. Recommended for unvaccinated and/or immunocompromised	Face masks required for unvaccinated students/staff when indoors May consider face masks for all at this stage based on local vaccination rates and other indicators of transmission.	Face masks required for all students/staff
Social Distancing & Cohorting	Small group activities take place, normal classroom & recess activities occur, etc...	Small group activities take place, normal classroom & recess activities occur, etc... Consider limiting crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities	Classroom & learning topic cohorts integrated into operations; limit group activities to cohorts Avoid crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities Increased Physical Distancing	Classroom & learning topic cohorts integrated into operations; limit/pause group activities Avoid crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities Increased Physical Distancing

Cleaning & Disinfecting	Districts adhere to normal cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety	Districts adhere to normal cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety. Additional cleaning for high-touch surfaces implemented	Districts implement increased cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety (increased thoroughness, frequency, high touch surfaces)	Districts implement increased cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety (increased thoroughness, frequency, high touch surfaces)
Food Service	Normal Food Service Operations	Normal Food Service Operations	Normal Food Service Operations for 12+ Elementary moves to meals in classroom or cohorts	Meals happen in cohorts/classrooms as feasible
Transportation	Normal transportation operations *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements	Normal transportation operations *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements	Normal transportation operations Increased health & safety protocols implemented (cleaning, pick-up rotations, ventilation, etc...) *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements	Normal transportation operations Increased health & safety protocols implemented (cleaning, pick-up rotations, ventilation, etc...) *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements
Visitors & Guests	Visitors & guests allowed in buildings. Recommended completion of health screening upon entry and masking for unvaccinated while indoors	Visitors & guests allowed in buildings. Recommended completion of health screening upon entry and masking for unvaccinated while indoors	Limit visitors & guests to essential for student health, safety & wellness Required completion of health screening upon entry and masking while indoors	Limit visitors & guests to essential for student health, safety & wellness; move to virtual connections where able Required completion of health screening upon

				entry and masking while indoors
Athletics	Practices & competitions permitted. Health screening and hygiene in place	Practices & competitions permitted; prioritize outdoor activities as much as possible Health screening and hygiene in place	Competitions may be paused; practices focus on skills building with increased social distancing required Health screening and hygiene in place Screening testing considered to support ongoing play	Competitions & practices may be paused. Health screening and hygiene in place Screening testing considered to support practices if recommended for continuation.
Extra-Curricular Activities	Extracurricular activities proceed as scheduled (Band/Choir/Drama operate normally)	Some extracurricular activity suspension and/or modifications could be expected (Consider incorporating face coverings for Band/Choir/Drama)	Extracurricular activities suspended; individual based activities that allow for appropriate social distancing may continue	Extracurricular activities suspended
Meetings & Conferences	School meetings & conference attendance takes place	School meetings & conference attendance takes place Increased social distancing in meeting space considered	Limit meetings in-person, increased social distancing. Consider suspending travel for conferences/meetings out of County (based on regional transmission)	In-person meetings/conferences suspended. Virtual platforms prioritized.
Hand Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette	Hand washing & proper cough/sneeze etiquette is prioritized. Reminder and education provided to all students and staff, with extra emphasis on education for prek-5 at year beginning. Hand washing to be supported throughout day, with focus on pre and post meal periods, recess and restroom use. Hand			

	sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol content will be available in classrooms and other student/staff locations (main office, cafeterias, entrances...)
Student & Staff Health Screening	Recommend all staff and students complete daily health screenings. Do NOT report to school if sick. ✓ <i>Students:</i> parents/guardians complete daily student wellness check prior to sending student to school. Students should adhere to school policy for reporting illness & return to school post-illness ✓ <i>Staff:</i> conduct daily wellness self-check prior to reporting to work; consider using Michigan's electronic assessment tool: https://misymptomapp.state.mi.us/
Contact Tracing, Isolation & Quarantine	Work with BCHD & RESA to support robust case investigation & contact tracing. Provide educational support for students and families who are impacted by isolation and quarantine. Isolation & quarantine will adhere to local public health requirements and operating procedures. Close contact identification will be supported by the school for classroom and athletic based close contact identification. Notes. Close contact exclusion will be determined by current school operations and policies currently in place for masking and social distancing. For example: ✓ No masking required. Close contacts within 6 ft of positive individual will be quarantined for 10 days from last date of contact. Fully vaccinated individuals do not quarantine unless symptomatic ✓ Face masks required. Close contacts within 3 ft of positive individual will be quarantined for 10 days from last date of contact. Individuals 3 to 6 ft may continue to attend school as long as they do not have any symptoms. Fully vaccinated individuals do not quarantine unless symptomatic.
Vaccinations	Districts will promote and encourage all eligible staff, students & families to be vaccinated. Will support access through provision of information (flyers, FAQs, etc...) to school personnel and families in partnership with BCHD. Will consider hosting onsite vaccination clinics as feasible.

Additional Guidance, Resources & Reference Materials:

Recommendations and prevention categories and strategies identified previously correspond and are based upon the following MDHSS & CDC guidance documents.

MDHHS issued a brief guidance document on June 25, 2021. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/COVID-19_Guidance_for_Operating_Schools_Safely_728838_7.pdf

CDC guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Kindergarten (K) -12 Schools. Updated July 9, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

MMWR. Disparities in Learning Mode Access Among K-12 Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Race/Ethnicity, Geography, and Grade Level. Issued June 29, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7026e2.htm>

Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs – Updated July 9, 2021.
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fmore%2Fscience-and-research%2Ftransmission_k_12_schools.html#print