

SUMMARY: ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION AT PRE-K TO GRADE 12 SCHOOLS, 2021-2022

This is a summary of the Erie County Department of Health's Guidance for In-person Instruction at Pre-K to Grade 12 schools for the 2021-2022 year. The goals of the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) in issuing this guidance are to return all students to an in-person learning experience, while also ensuring the safety of all students, faculty, and staff by reducing the risks of COVID-19 disease transmission in school settings, and maximizing staff and student time in classroom settings and extracurricular activities during the 2021-2022 school year. This guidance applies to public and private elementary (including pre-kindergarten), middle, and high schools in Erie County. **This guidance is subject to change.** The complete document is available at www.erie.gov/covid19/schools.

- 1. Masking:** Face masks are required indoors for all individuals age 2 years and older, regardless of vaccination status, at all times in all classroom and non-classroom settings, and buses. Masks are strongly recommended outdoors. Mask breaks may be taken by students once every hour for approximately 5 minutes. Students should be seated and stationary at their desks during mask breaks. If students are seated closer than 6 feet, stagger breaks so that students closer than 6 feet are not taking breaks at the same time. Persons who cannot safely wear a mask because of a disability or medical condition should work with the school for a reasonable accommodation.
- 2. Physical Distancing:** Schools should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their facilities but should not exclude students from in-person learning to meet a minimum distance requirement. Several studies from the 2020-2021 school year show low COVID-19 transmission levels among students in schools that had less than 6 feet of physical distance when the school implemented and layered other prevention strategies, such as the use of masks. The guidance document outlines recommendations for students, staff, band, chorus & orchestra, busing and transportation, and cohorting.
- 3. Health Monitoring:** ECDOH requires daily health screenings, including temperature and a COVID-19 symptom check upon entry into school of all students, faculty, staff, contractors, vendors, and visitors to identify individuals who may have COVID-19. ECDOH requires that if a student or staff member develops COVID-19 symptoms while at school, regardless of vaccination status, the ill person must immediately be placed in an isolation area/room at school and picked up by a parent/guardian if a student or sent home if a staff member. ECDOH requires schools to maintain isolation areas/rooms separated from others for students or staff who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. These designated rooms should be monitored, overseen, and logged.
- 4. Returning to School Following Illness:** The guidance document outlines return-to-school requirements for students and staff following COVID-19-like illness or a positive COVID-19 test. ECDOH offers free COVID-19 PCR testing to symptomatic Erie County residents and close contacts of confirmed cases. Other local testing sites are listed at www.erie.gov/covidtestsites. COVID-19 diagnostic testing is fully covered by all health insurance plans per federal mandates.

A negative at-home COVID-19 test result will NOT be accepted to return a student to school or school staff to work.

5. **When the School Receives Notice of a COVID-19 Positive Case:** ECDOH requires schools to notify the ECDOH school team of all positive COVID-19 cases reported by staff, students, or guardians. The school is required to prepare a list of classroom, bus, sports, and extracurricular activities close contacts. Close contacts are defined as students who are within 3 feet or teachers/staff who are within 6 feet from the positive COVID-19 case for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period during a time the case was infectious.
6. **Quarantine:** ECDOH uses the close contact definition along with the duration of exposure, proximity, and presence of symptoms to determine who is an exposed contact and therefore subject to quarantine. Schools are required to cooperate with contact tracers to determine close contacts and compile contact information. ECDOH will notify parents and staff who are considered to be contacts exposed to a COVID-19 case. **Persons are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 ≥ 2 weeks after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or ≥ 2 weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson & Johnson [J&J]/Janssen).** The guidance document outlines quarantine requirements for fully vaccinated and unvaccinated close contacts.
7. **Youth Sports:** ECDOH requires schools to notify the ECDOH school team of all youth sport positive COVID-19 cases reported by coaches, staff, students, or guardians. The guidance document outlines criteria to pause sports team activities and/or quarantine unvaccinated players and coaching staff. If a school or district shifts students to virtual learning because of the number of COVID-19 cases in a building or district, all youth sports associated with the school are required to stop for the duration of the virtual learning period.
8. **COVID-19 Vaccination:** Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely continue in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports. Fully vaccinated individuals will not be subject to the same quarantine requirements as those who are not fully vaccinated in most circumstances.
9. **COVID-19 Screening Testing:** COVID-19 screening testing is recommended for students and staff who are not fully vaccinated at least once per week during moderate, substantial, and high transmission as per CDC guidance. ECDOH continues to work with schools to implement COVID-19 screening testing programs to those interested.
10. **Cleaning and Disinfection:** In general, cleaning once a day sufficiently removes potential virus that may be on surfaces. Disinfecting (using disinfectants on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency COVID-19 list: <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/about-list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19-0>) removes any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection. If a facility has had a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, clean AND disinfect the space.
11. **Ventilation:** ECDOH encourages improving ventilation (HVAC and air filtration systems), bringing fresh outdoor air into buildings, opening multiple doors and windows, and using child-safe fans. During transportation, open or crack windows in buses and other forms of transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.