



Department of Public Health

MAYOR
Oscar Leeser

CITY OF EL PASO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH COVID-19 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOL 2021-2022

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CITY MANAGER
Tommy Gonzalez

August 3, 2021

The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH) is updating its recommendations for the 2021-2022 academic year, due to the concerning rise in new cases, the increased level of community transmission and the confirmation of delta variant in our community.

COVID-19 pandemic continues to prove its volatility and unpredictability. Hence the need to update recommendations, based on the careful and meticulous analysis of available data from how this pandemic affects our community.

It is of paramount importance that individuals eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine get vaccinated; that is everyone 12 years of age and older that have no true contraindications to receive any of the three FDA approved and available vaccines in the US. These recommendations continue to recognize vaccination of eligible individuals against COVID-19 as one of the most important public health tools to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in the school setting.

As vaccination efforts continue in our community, the benefits of herd immunity will be reflected in schools. Vaccinated individuals will not need to quarantine or test for COVID-19 following a known high-risk exposure (less than 6 ft for more than 15 cumulative minutes) unless they become symptomatic within 14 days after exposure. Conversely, unvaccinated individuals should quarantine and be tested following a known high-risk exposure.

Another very important intervention and tool that is included in all the layered safety and prevention plans is the universal use of face coverings. DPH strongly recommends that everyone attending an educational setting wears a face mask or face covering regardless of their vaccination status; as it has been proven its benefit preventing infections and further spreading the virus by acting as source control and as personal protection.

Unvaccinated individuals and those vaccinated with a weak immune system because of underlying medical conditions are at risk of becoming infected, particularly with circulating COVID-19 variants that are more infectious than the original virus.

Angela Mora – Health Director

Department of Public Health | 5115 El Paso Drive | El Paso, TX 79905
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DELIVERING **EXCEPTIONAL** SERVICES



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While physical distancing between students may not be feasible, the use of face masks for students, teachers, and staff in general will continue to be of utmost importance in addition to other interventions such as isolation of sick students and proper hygiene. Distancing of at least 3 feet between desks continues to be recommended for middle schools and high schools, if possible, within the physical space of each classroom.

Following are detailed recommendations for the three levels of education:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Health:

- Universal use of face mask is strongly recommended to anyone over the age of 2 years, unless there is a medical contraindication, regardless of their COVID-19 immunization status.
- Continue health screenings, preferably before school to identify students and adults who are sick. Those identified as sick at school, should be sent to the nurse's office for further evaluation.
- Avoid emphasis on perfect attendance to allow parents to keep children at home if feeling sick or quarantining.
- Routine testing is not recommended.
- Recommend testing of students and adults that are sick and symptomatic.
- Testing of fully vaccinated students/adults is recommended 3-5 days after exposure for those asymptomatic and at any point if they are symptomatic.
- Encourage vaccination for those who are eligible but not vaccinated.
- DPH WILL require quarantining of unvaccinated students, teachers, staff identified as high risk exposed to a positive COVID-19 individual.
- DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines should be followed for all individuals.
 - ❖ Quarantine and testing of adults or students who are NOT fully vaccinated is recommended after a high-risk exposure.
 - ❖ Quarantine and/or testing of exposed students and adults is not required if they are fully vaccinated, unless they become symptomatic.
- Contact tracing procedures will continue in place, keeping accurate census of students and teachers.

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Distancing:

- Distancing is of utmost importance for children who are sick and symptomatic. Isolating children as soon as a teacher or other staff identifies them as sick is imperative.
- Distancing students' desks may not be feasible due to space limitations and learning activities requiring student interaction.
- Children can remain in pods for indoor activities such as lunch in the cafeteria.
- Distancing is not necessary outdoors.

Hygiene:

- Teach proper handwashing and allow time between activities for handwashing.
- Encourage students to bring their own water bottles and allow students to refill bottles in school.
- Keep water fountains functional and promote the use of water bottles at the fountains to avoid bringing the face and mouth to the waterspout.
- Recommend that unvaccinated students wear face masks.
- Teach proper face mask use and, for mask wearers, recommend bringing several for the day/week.
- Enhance cleaning and disinfection of water fountains.
- Teach children to keep their desk/working area clean.
- Continue enhanced cleaning and sanitation of schools.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Health:

- Universal use of face mask is strongly recommended to anyone over the age of 2 years, unless there is a medical contraindication, regardless of their COVID-19 immunization status.
- Continue health screenings, preferably before school to identify students and adults who are sick. Those identified as sick at school, should be sent to the nurse's office for further evaluation.
- Avoid emphasis on perfect attendance to allow parents to keep children at home if feeling sick or quarantining.
- Routine testing is not recommended at this time.
- Recommend testing of students and adults that are sick and symptomatic.

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- Testing of fully vaccinated students/adults is recommended 3-5 days after exposure for those asymptomatic and at any point if they are symptomatic.
- Encourage vaccination for those who are eligible but not vaccinated.
- DPH WILL require quarantining of unvaccinated students, teachers, staff identified as high risk exposed to a positive COVID-19 individual.
- DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines should be followed for all individuals.
 - ❖ Quarantine and testing of adults or students who are NOT fully vaccinated is recommended after a high-risk exposure.
 - ❖ Quarantine and/or testing of exposed students and adults is not required if they are fully vaccinated, unless they become symptomatic.
- Contact tracing procedures will continue in place, keeping accurate census of students and teachers.
- Student athletes who are not fully vaccinated may be tested routinely before games.
- Students diagnosed with COVID-19 should not be tested routinely before games for 90 days following date of diagnosis. After 90 days, they should continue be routinely tested before games if NOT fully vaccinated.
- RTP protocol still in effect for student athletes sick with COVID-19 while in sport season.

Distancing:

- The most important aspect of distancing will be for those students that are sick and symptomatic. Isolating students as soon as a teacher or other staff identifies them as sick is the most important aspect.
- Distancing students' desks may not be feasible within the classroom because of space constraints.
- If school has a high COVID-19 immunization rate (75% or higher) for students and adults, distancing between healthy vaccinated students and adults is not necessary and should not be a priority.
- Students can remain in pods for indoor group activities such as lunch in the cafeteria, etc. No distancing between students is required outdoors.
- It is recommended that teachers switch classrooms instead of mixing student groups.

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Hygiene:

- Recommend that unvaccinated students wear face masks.
- Teach proper face mask use, and for mask wearers, recommend bringing several for the day/week.
- Teach proper handwashing and allow time for handwashing.
- Encourage students to bring their own water bottles and allow students to refill water bottles in school.
- Keep water fountains functional and promote the use of water bottles at the fountains to avoid bringing the face and mouth to the waterspout.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of water fountains is recommended.
- Discourage individuals from placing their face and mouth directly on water fountains and waterspouts.
- Encourage students to keep their desk clean.
- Continue enhanced cleaning and sanitation of schools.

HIGH SCHOOL

Health:

- Universal use of face mask is strongly recommended to anyone over the age of 2 years, unless there is a medical contraindication, regardless of their COVID-19 immunization status.
- Continue health screenings, preferably before school to identify students and adults who are sick. Those identified as sick at school, should be sent to the nurse's office for further evaluation.
- Avoid emphasis on perfect attendance to allow parents to keep children at home if feeling sick or quarantining.
- Routine testing is not recommended.
- Recommend testing of students and adults that are sick and symptomatic.
- Testing of fully vaccinated students/adults is recommended 3-5 days after exposure for those asymptomatic and at any point if they are symptomatic.
- Encourage vaccination for those who are eligible but not vaccinated.
- DPH WILL require quarantining of unvaccinated students, teachers, staff identified as high risk exposed to a positive COVID-19 individual.
- DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines should be followed for all individuals.
 - ❖ Quarantine and testing of adults or students who are NOT fully vaccinated is recommended after a high-risk exposure.

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❖ Quarantine and/or testing of exposed students and adults is not required if they are fully vaccinated, unless they become symptomatic.

- Contact tracing procedures will continue in place, keeping accurate census of students and teachers.
- Student athletes who are not fully vaccinated may be tested routinely before games.
- Students diagnosed with COVID-19 should not be tested routinely before games for 90 days following date of diagnosis. After 90 days, they should continue be routinely tested before games if NOT fully vaccinated.
- RTP protocol still in effect for student athletes sick with COVID while in sport season.

Distancing:

- Distancing is a critical element that must be observed for students and adults that are sick and symptomatic. Isolating students as soon as a teacher or other staff identifies them as sick is critical.
- Distancing between students may not be feasible within the classroom due to space constraints.
- If school has a high COVID-19 immunization rate (75% or higher) for students and adults, distancing between healthy vaccinated students and adults is not necessary and should not be a priority.
- Students may remain in pods for indoor group activities such as lunch in the cafeteria, etc. No distancing between students is required outdoors.
- It is recommended that teachers switch classrooms instead of mixing student groups.

Hygiene:

- Recommend that those who are not vaccinated wear face masks.
- Promote and encourage proper handwashing and allow time for handwashing.
- Encourage students to bring their own water bottles and allow them to refill their bottles in school.
- Keep water fountains functional and promote the use of water bottles at the fountains to avoid bringing the face and mouth to waterspout.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of water fountains is recommended.
- Discourage individuals from placing their face and mouth directly on water fountains and waterspouts.
- Encourage students to keep their desks clean.

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- Continue enhanced cleaning and sanitation of schools.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

Students with Special Medical Needs:

Vaccination against COVID-19 is strongly recommended for all eligible students, unless contraindicated. It is of utmost importance that teachers and staff working with students with special medical needs be vaccinated against COVID-19 to considerably reduce the risk of infection and prevent outbreaks and complications among medically vulnerable students.

Face masks are strongly recommended for all adults while caring for students with special medical needs. DPH also strongly recommends that all students over the age of 2 years wear face masks unless medically contraindicated.

Distancing between students with special medical needs, teachers, and aides may not be feasible but it is recommended to maintain the same staff and students within the classroom to decrease the risk of infection.

The DPH continues to recommend the enhanced cleaning and sanitation of used spaces and frequent handwashing practices by students and staff. Maintaining pods of students and teachers as part of a comprehensive prevention strategy within a layered safety plan of a school has proven to be an effective practice.

Face Masks on School Buses:

On January 29, 2021, the CDC issued an order requiring face masks to be worn by all people while on public transportation, including school buses.

Texas Governor Gregg Abbot, under executive order GA-36, has prohibited schools from requiring face masks. However, face masks continue to be strongly recommended for all individuals, particularly those unvaccinated and schools should follow their legal department's advice on compliance with current federal and state mandates.

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