

CORONAVIRUS GUIDANCE

2021-2022 School Year

Students benefit from in-person learning and safely returning to classroom instruction is a priority. NCDHHS developed the 2021 StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit in alignment with recommendations from the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics. The toolkit and other guidance for schools (which may change as needed based on new recommendations and COVID-19 trends) is available at <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance#schools>.

The StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit prioritizes strategies shown to be most effective in lowering the risk of COVID-19 in classrooms and school activities (such as masking, distancing, and vaccinations). Actions not supported by current evidence (such as limiting visitors, one-way hallways, and daily symptom screenings) have been removed.

The toolkit contains strategies that SHOULD be implemented by all schools, as well as additional measures that COULD be considered. It is the responsibility of local schools/school districts to implement this guidance starting July 30, 2021 in consultation with local health departments.

Schools in Transylvania County are expected to adopt and enforce the following measures. *If these prevention strategies are not consistently implemented, we anticipate spread of COVID-19 in classroom and extracurricular settings, resulting in more isolation and quarantine for both students and staff, additional missed instructional time, and possible staffing shortages.*

PROMOTE VACCINATION

- Require staff to report COVID-19 vaccination status. Require staff who are not vaccinated or do not disclose vaccination status to participate in regular screening testing.
- Encourage staff, eligible students, and families to be vaccinated. Provide information to staff and families about vaccination. Offer flexible sick leave and excused absences for getting vaccinated and possible side effects. Consider partnering to offer vaccines at schools.

REQUIRE UNIVERSAL FACE MASKS INDOORS

- Require all children and staff in schools K-12 to wear face coverings consistently when indoors. Provide masks to students who need them.
- Ensure 3 feet of distance at mealtimes when students cannot consistently wear masks. Consider holding mealtimes outdoors if possible.
- Require that all passengers and staff wear a face covering on buses and other school group transportation.

MINIMIZE EXPOSURES

- Maintain 3 feet of distance between all K-12 students to the greatest extent possible without excluding students from full-time in-person learning.
- Maintain at least 6 feet of distance between adults and students and between adults who are not vaccinated to the extent possible.
- Follow guidelines for youth sports (available at <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/582/open>).
Masks are required indoors at schools for all coaches, athletes, spectators, and other participants. This guidance recommends masks for all sports indoors at other facilities and when outdoors and closer than 6 feet apart, as well as arranging equipment and participants in group classes 6 feet apart, cohorting workouts, avoiding direct contact and up-close face-to-face communication, scheduling buffer times between games, practicing social distance as much as possible, limiting shared equipment and disinfecting all shared equipment between uses, avoiding use of shared hydration options, and using pre-packaged food and drinks.
- Consider steps to minimize exposure in areas where staff may congregate (staff meetings, planning periods, lunch, recess, break rooms, etc.).
- Consider choosing physical education activities that limit close contact.
- Consider allowing visitors and volunteers as long as they follow the same protocols as staff and students.

PROVIDE TESTING

- Require staff to report vaccination status. Require staff who are not vaccinated or do not disclose vaccination status to participate in regular screening testing.
- Offer free rapid testing on-site at school for students and staff who have symptoms of COVID-19 or close contact to someone with COVID-19, or refer these individuals to testing.
- Offer screening testing weekly for staff and students who are not fully vaccinated. Recommend weekly testing for students who participate in sports or other extracurricular activities and are not fully vaccinated and twice-weekly testing for students participating in high-risk activities in areas of substantial community transmission. (High-risk activities should be cancelled or held virtually in areas of high transmission unless all participants are vaccinated.)

PROPERLY ADDRESS POSSIBLE AND CONFIRMED CASES

- Have staff and families self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. Enforce that staff and students disclose symptoms and stay home (or go home) if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test for COVID-19.
- Immediately isolate symptomatic individuals at school in a dedicated space and require them to wear a face covering while waiting to leave campus or be tested. Plan for transportation for sick individuals. Provide visual supervision for symptomatic students by staff who are at least 6 feet away and wearing a face mask.
- Ensure that nurses or staff who provide direct patient care wear appropriate PPE.
- Report any suspected or confirmed cases to local public health. Assist local public health with contact tracing.
- Do not allow individuals to enter school or other activities until they are released from isolation/quarantine.

PROMOTE HAND HYGIENE AND CLEAN SURFACES

- Provide adequate supplies for handwashing and hand sanitizing.
- Teach and reinforce handwashing.
- Clean surfaces once a day, prioritizing high-touch surfaces.
- If a sick person has been in the facility in the past 24 hours, clean and disinfect the area according to CDC guidance using an EPA-approved disinfectant. Ensure safe and correct storage of cleaning products.

REDUCE RISK ON TRANSPORTATION

- Ensure that all students ages 5 years or older and all staff and other adults wear face coverings on school buses or other transportation, unless an exception applies.
- Plan for getting sick students home without group transportation (individuals who become sick during the day cannot use group transportation to return home and drivers who become sick during the day cannot drive students until released to return to work).
- Open windows when the vehicle is in motion to increase circulation.
- Clean vehicles regularly. Clean frequently-touched surfaces prior to morning routes and afternoon routes.
- Provide hand sanitizer.
- Consider creating distance between individuals (3 feet between students and 6 feet between the driver and students) if possible.

ENSURE SAFE WATER AND VENTILATION SYSTEMS

- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible. Take steps to increase total airflow, improve air filtration, and reduce unfiltered recirculation.
- Position fans carefully to not blow air directly from one person across another (instead, use fans to exhaust air out open windows, which draws in fresh air without generating strong air currents).
- Ensure that all water systems and faucets/drinking fountains are safe for use after prolonged shutdown.

PROTECT VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- Include accommodations on health-related plans to limit risk of exposure for students with special health needs.
- Enable staff who self-identify as high risk for severe COVID-19 illness to minimize face-to-face contact and maintain 6 feet of distance from others, modify job responsibilities to reduce exposure, or telework if possible.
- Create a plan to address requests for alternative learning arrangements. Offer remote or other learning options for students not in school due to isolation or quarantine.

ISOLATION for people with symptoms or positive test result

Individuals who have a positive COVID-19 test result or who have symptoms and were not tested may return to school after 10 days from their first day of symptoms (or test date) and after 24 hours with no fever and after other symptoms are improving.

Individuals with symptoms who receive a negative COVID-19 test result or an alternative diagnosis may return to school after 24 hours with no fever and 24 hours of feeling well, unless in quarantine or told otherwise by a medical professional.

QUARANTINE for people exposed to someone with COVID-19

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated who have been in close contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes) to someone with COVID-19 can return to school after completing up to 14 days of quarantine, which begins after the last known day of exposure. Some individuals may be allowed to leave quarantine earlier than 14 days but must continue to closely monitor symptoms and wear a mask for the full 14 days.

Students who are not fully vaccinated do NOT need to quarantine after a close contact in a classroom setting IF masks were worn appropriately and consistently by both the person with COVID-19 and the potentially exposed person. *This exception does not apply to staff or other adults or to exposures during athletics or other extracurricular activities.*

Individuals who are fully vaccinated and do not have symptoms do NOT need to quarantine after a close contact. They should be tested 3-5 days after their last exposure and should wear a mask around others until receiving a negative test result.