

State officials recommend CDC school COVID-19 guidance for fall

With students, families, and K-12 educators preparing for the start of the 2021-22 school year amid concerns about an uptick in COVID-19 cases driven by the Delta variant, health and education officials are recommending that schools follow CDC's guidance for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools this fall. These best practice recommendations reflect the current state of the pandemic as well as the importance of in-person learning.

The guidance document highlights CDC best practice recommendations for implementing layered prevention strategies (using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect people who are not fully vaccinated. Among the specific points covered in the guidance:

- **All people ages 12 years and older should get vaccinated for COVID-19** before returning to in-person school, sports, or other activities to protect themselves and people around them who cannot get vaccinated.
- **All students, teachers, staff, and visitors in school buildings should wear masks indoors regardless of vaccination status** in order to protect those who cannot yet be vaccinated or who remain at higher risk because of immune-compromised status or other conditions.
- **Schools should maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms whenever possible.**
- **Students, teachers, and staff should stay home if they have signs of any infectious illness**, and should contact their health care provider for testing and care.
- **Students, teachers, and staff who have been fully vaccinated do not need to stay home even if they have had recent close contact with a confirmed case, so long as they remain asymptomatic and do not test positive.** Follow CDC testing guidance for anyone exposed to a confirmed case.
- **People who are not fully vaccinated and returning to in-person school, sports, or extracurricular activities (and their families) should get tested regularly** for COVID-19 according to CDC guidance.
- **Schools should continue to strengthen good ventilation, rapid and thorough contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, handwashing,**

**respiratory etiquette, cleaning, and disinfection** as important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.

While there are no longer mandates that schools follow this guidance, it does represent the most current science-based best practices for safe in-person learning. The recommendations are designed to support local school boards and school leaders as they make decisions for the upcoming school year, and help Minnesota students get back in the classroom safely.

“In-person learning is critical, not only when it comes to academics, but also for our students’ social-emotional well-being and mental health,” said Minnesota Education Commissioner Dr. Heather Mueller. “As we head back to school this fall, we must implement measures to protect the health and safety of all of our students, staff and families.”

Proactive COVID-19 prevention strategies remain critical to protect people – including students, teachers, and staff – who are not fully vaccinated or who have certain medical conditions, especially in areas of moderate-to-high community transmission levels. According to Minnesota Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm, the basic tools for fighting COVID-19 remain the same even as the virus itself has evolved into new variants that spread more easily from person to person and make containment more challenging.

“Vaccination, masking, and physical distancing remain our best public health prevention strategies for slowing the spread of COVID-19,” Commissioner Malcolm said. “The Delta variant is proving to have an alarming ability to spread more easily, so it’s more important than ever that anyone eligible for vaccination get that protection as soon as possible, and follow the CDC’s guidance for continued masking, distancing and other prevention strategies to help avoid the widespread illnesses and community impacts we saw during the last school year.”

Education and health officials emphasized that Minnesotans 12 years of age and older should get vaccinated for COVID-19 before returning to in-person school, sports, or other extracurricular activities.