



El Paso County Public Health COVID-19 School and Child Care Guidance

This guidance was updated on 08/03/2021

Executive Summary

El Paso County Public Health's (EPCPH) mission is to promote and protect public health and environmental quality across El Paso County through people, prevention and partnerships. Our role in assuring public health and safety has never been clearer and more immediate than during the current and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. While much of this effort is focused on disease mitigation, our actions are always guided towards addressing the social determinants of health and helping our citizens fulfill their mental, physical, and emotional potential. EPCPH appreciates the hard work and collaborative efforts from our school partners to help create safe learning environments, reduce the transmission of COVID-19, and protect the health of our students, staff, teachers, and communities.

Public Health Requirements

- Per Colorado Revised State Statute, COVID-19 is a reportable condition in Colorado. It must be reported within 24 hours of a confirmed or suspected case, in the same category as infectious diseases like measles, meningitis, botulism or pertussis (whooping cough). See page 2 for additional information.
- Face coverings are still required on public transportation, including school buses, for anyone 2 and older, with specific exceptions (see page 3). It is recommended as a best practice for unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated individuals in all other settings.
- Isolation of cases and quarantine of their contacts will continue to be required and are the same as they are for any other qualifying individual in a non-school setting. See page 5 for the process.

Public Health Recommendations

While not requirements, we have listed a series of steps on pages 6-8 that schools can implement to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Outbreaks

It is required for outbreaks to continue to be recorded and reported by CDPHE. The new criteria announced earlier this summer is five or more confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases in non-household members within a 14-day window. At least one case must have a positive molecular amplification test or a positive antigen test from a respiratory specimen. See page 6 for additional details.

Questions?

El Paso County Public Health is available to help you make the best plans for your school

- During business hours, you can reach us at (719) 578-3220.
- During nights and weekends, you can reach us at (719) 235-2278.
- You can also email our team dedicated to schools at schoolscovid19@elpasoco.com.

Please make sure there is a designated point of contact or COVID coordinator that EPCPH can reach out to. This allows us to reach you if we are notified of a positive case in your school, and to share any new information throughout the year.

COVID-19 School and Child Care Guidance

Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide schools and child care facilities with an understanding of what is required as well as guidance that is grounded in our current understanding of COVID-19. Using a layered approach to the recommended prevention strategies in this document is essential to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to promote the health and well-being of our school and child care communities. As EPCPH works with schools and child cares to keep students healthy and engaged in learning during this school year, public health recommendations will continue to be based on current scientific understanding of COVID-19 with the priority of keeping students and their families, faculty, and the broader community safe.

EPCPH hopes to continue the strong relationships developed with our school and child care partners into the 2021-2022 school year. EPCPH will continue to have a dedicated team available to discuss requirements, specific scenarios, and best practice recommendations. EPCPH will continue to keep our partners up-to-date regarding public health guidance, as well as any applicable public health orders or other legal requirements.

Public Health Regulations

- COVID-19 is a reportable condition in Colorado. Positive COVID-19 cases as well as suspected and confirmed outbreaks must be reported to EPCPH by schools and child cares according to [Colorado State Statute §25-1-122, C.R.S. and Board of Health Rule 6 CCR 1009-1](#). In Colorado, schools and child cares are required to follow these rules and regulations for communicable diseases:
 - [Rules and Regulations Governing the Health and Sanitation of Child Care Facilities in the State of Colorado](#)
 - [Rules and Regulations Governing Schools in the State of Colorado](#)
 - [Infectious Disease Guidelines and Disease Reporting Requirements, for all Infectious Diseases Including COVID](#)
- Isolation and quarantine are important practices used to limit the transmission and spread of infectious diseases. EPCPH will continue using isolation and quarantine as prevention tools for COVID-19, pursuant to Colorado State Statute §25-1-122, C.R.S. and Board of Health Rule 6 CCR 1009-1.
 - Positive COVID-19 cases must complete isolation. Cases need to isolate until **all three** of the following criteria have been met:
 - 10 days have passed from the symptom onset date (or date of positive test if asymptomatic or symptom onset date is unknown),
 - **AND** fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine,
 - **AND** improvement in symptoms.
 - EPCPH will continue to recommend that contacts of positive COVID-19 cases complete quarantine.
 - Current [quarantine exemptions](#) apply for fully vaccinated (two weeks after final vaccine

dose) individuals and those within 90 days of a positive COVID-19 infection.

- EPCPH welcomes school and child care's involvement in this process. At a minimum, schools will need to facilitate EPCPH investigations and the transfer of necessary contact information.

Mask Requirement:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [requires](#) face coverings for those aged 2 and above on all public transportation regardless of vaccine status. This includes drivers and passengers on school buses unless the bus driver is riding in the school bus alone.

What School and Child Care Partners Can Expect From EPCPH

- Schools and child cares that prefer to continue their current internal contact tracing and notification processes may continue to do so. EPCPH will provide technical assistance and/or training as needed.
- If schools or child cares choose to end contact tracing and exposure notifications within their communities, EPCPH will complete any necessary case investigations and contact tracing.
- Additional resources can be found on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) [Practical Guide for Operationalizing CDC's School Guidance](#).
- While investigating reportable communicable diseases, including COVID-19, EPCPH may require isolation of ill individuals and/or quarantine of exposed individuals pursuant to [Colorado State Statute §25-1-122, C.R.S. and Board of Health Rule 6 CCR 1009-1](#).

How School and Child Care Partners Can Help EPCPH

- Provide a preferred point of contact (POC) or "COVID coordinator" for your district or facility to EPCPH. If you have a different COVID coordinator from last year, please ensure EPCPH has the most up-to-date contact information.
- EPCPH will continue our notification process by email or phone to POCs within each school or child care of confirmed or probable cases who worked or attended school in-person during their infectious period.
- Be prepared to collect and provide a list of close contacts to EPCPH such that our case investigation and contact tracing team can complete contact tracing and notify exposed individuals to quarantine.

When EPCPH is Notified of a COVID-19 Positive Case

- EPCPH will notify the COVID coordinator, child care director, or best point of contact for the facility in the event an exposure occurred at school or child care via email or phone call.
- If EPCPH will be completing contact tracing, the school or child care will be asked to provide:
 - A general notification to parents and staff that a case was present and that EPCPH will reach out to them individually if they are considered a close contact to recommend isolation or quarantine.
 - This allows families to make informed decisions.
 - A list of individuals who are considered close contacts (within three feet of the case in a typical classroom setting for greater than 15 minutes, cumulative over 24 hours) within the facility.
- EPCPH will complete the contact tracing and quarantine notification.

When a School or Child Care is Notified of a COVID-19 Positive Case

- Schools and child cares are required to report COVID-19 positive cases to EPCPH according to [Colorado State Statute §25-1-122, C.R.S. and Board of Health Rule 6 CCR 1009-1](#).
- In the event of a positive COVID-19 case, please notify EPCPH via email or phone call:
 - Routine business hours (must leave a voicemail): (719) 578-3220
 - After-hours/weekends (please leave a voicemail): (719) 235-2278
 - By encrypted email: [schools covid19@elpasoco.com](mailto:schoolscovid19@elpasoco.com)
- EPCPH will complete case investigation and contact tracing as needed and/or requested. If it is determined there was exposure within the facility or at a school- or child care-associated event, EPCPH will request a class roster from the school to notify contacts to quarantine.
 - Information requested by EPCPH will include name, date of birth, parent name and parent contact information.

General Isolation and Quarantine Guidelines

- **Positive cases of COVID-19** need to isolate until all three of these criteria have been met:
 - 10 days have passed from the symptom onset date (or date of positive test if asymptomatic or symptom onset date is unknown),
 - **AND** fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine,
 - **AND** improvement in symptoms.
- After exposure to COVID-19 positive individual, a person may become ill or infectious anytime between two and 14 days after their last exposure to COVID-19.
 - **Exposed individuals** should complete the quarantine period starting from the last day of exposure to the **confirmed, probable or suspect case, unless they are fully vaccinated – see below**.
 - **Please see CDPHE's updated guidance [How to Quarantine](#)**.
 - If the **exposed individual** cannot isolate themselves from the **confirmed, probable or suspect case** (e.g., household members), then the last day of exposure starts on the day the **case** is no longer infectious (a minimum of 10 days).
 - If **exposed individuals** develop symptoms during the quarantine period, they should either follow the isolation guidelines or finish the quarantine, whichever is the longer time period.
 - Exposed individuals who are **fully vaccinated** (two weeks after final vaccine dose) are exempt from quarantine following an exposure to COVID-19 if they remain asymptomatic.
 - These individuals should monitor for symptoms for 14 days following the exposure. If they develop symptoms they should isolate, consult their health care provider, and get tested.
 - An individual is not considered fully vaccinated until two weeks have passed from their second vaccine dose (if Pfizer or Moderna) or single vaccine dose (if Johnson & Johnson).
- **Modified quarantine:** School nurses, health paraprofessionals, and other school district employees trained to provide direct medical care, including medication administration, to students are permitted to operate under a modified quarantine. Modified quarantine allows employees who remain asymptomatic following an exposure to continue to work for their quarantine period while following standard quarantine rules outside the workplace. Modified quarantine requires the person to wear a mask while in the facility, utilize personal protective equipment (PPE) with each patient, self-monitor both at home and at work, practice

physical distancing (at least six feet), refrain from public outings, as well as stay within the cohort of exposure through the entire quarantine period.

- If the exposed essential staff member becomes symptomatic during the 14 days, the person must **not** work, must notify their employer immediately and will be placed in isolation for 10 days.
- If any contacts are identified from the ill essential staff member, they will need to complete a full quarantine period from last day of exposure.

Contact Tracing

- Contact tracing can be performed by the school or child care in conjunction with EPCPH or wholly by EPCPH to assist schools in identifying those students and faculty at risk of infection so they can be safely and quickly quarantined so as not to further spread infection.
- **Close contacts are defined as** individuals who were within three feet of the case in a typical classroom setting for greater than 15 minutes total (cumulative over 24 hours); **OR** for those who had physical contact, provided care for someone with COVID-19, shared eating or drinking utensils, had respiratory droplets land on them from coughing or sneezing of an infected person, **up to 48 hours before symptoms or since the onset of symptoms.**
- For pre-K and child care settings, consider additional types of close contact, including feeding, diapering, and holding. Due to the close proximity of caregiver and child in these circumstances, very short durations of exposure will warrant quarantine if a case is detected in a caregiver or child.
- Each school and child care should keep and maintain appropriate records such that they are able to complete contact tracing within their school or facility or to share with EPCPH if we will be contact tracing on your behalf.
 - Schools and child cares are recommended to keep staff, teachers, and parents informed that EPCPH may contact them and encourage participation with investigations. Regardless of symptoms, students, staff, and teachers identified as being positive with COVID-19 will need to isolate and remain out of school or daycare for 10 days from symptom onset (or test collection if asymptomatic), and all identified close contacts will need to complete quarantine from last day of exposure to the case and remain out of school.

Outbreaks in Schools and Child Cares

Confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks are defined as **five or more confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases in non-household members within a 14-day window. At least one case must have a positive molecular amplification test or a positive antigen test from a respiratory specimen.**

- Every outbreak will be unique and will be handled on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with EPCPH. To report a COVID-19 case or potential outbreak, including all suspect outbreaks, contact EPCPH at **719-578-3220**.
- Outbreaks will be named for the school, not cohort or activity, regardless of whether they are identified in a class/cohort, school, or extracurricular activity associated with the school. Subsequent cases will be included under the current active outbreak. Investigation may still occur at the cohort level.
- EPCPH is required to report confirmed outbreaks to CDPHE. Case and outbreak definitions can be found [here](#).

Masking

General Rule: Mask are no longer required in schools or child care facilities.

Recommendations:

- CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Please see the most recent [CDPHE](#) and [CDC guidance](#) concerning updates, changes, or special circumstances concerning mask use in K-12 education.

Public Health Recommendations and Best Practices

Given our current understanding of the virus and its transmission, these are the practical actions that are proven to reduce spread of the virus which will help keep our students, families, and faculty safe and allow continuity of in-person education while limiting the potential for disease transmission.

- **Vaccinations:** The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine has been authorized for those 12 and older, and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have been authorized for those 18 and older. The vaccine is the strongest tool we have in the prevention of COVID-19. EPCPH encourages vaccination for all of those who are eligible to receive it. For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines and locations, visit [EPCPH's website](#). Schools and community organizations can request an onsite vaccine event or mobile vaccine clinic by contacting schoolscovid19@elpasoco.com.
 - It is critical that schools and families do everything they can to keep our student and faculty populations healthy to minimize disease spread and keep kids and teachers healthy and in school. Increased vaccinations within schools can assist in keeping students safe from other circulating respiratory diseases.
- **Hand hygiene:** Frequent and thorough hand washing before and after touching shared surfaces, eating, using the restroom, entering or exiting classrooms or touching of the face, mouth, nose, or mask along with appropriate education on proper washing is key.
- **Distancing:** CDC recommends schools maintain at least three feet of distancing in addition to mask use in school settings for unvaccinated individuals. For more information, please review the [CDC](#) K-12 school guidance.
- **Mask use:** Wearing a mask helps to significantly reduce disease transmission. Face coverings can be a critical component of disease mitigation when physical distancing cannot be maintained. CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Please see the most recent [CDPHE](#) and [CDC](#) guidance concerning updates, changes, or special circumstances concerning mask use in K-12 education.
- **Symptom screening:**
 - Students, staff, and teachers who are experiencing symptoms of a communicable disease should stay home from school or child care, seek guidance from their health care provider, and possibly pursue testing for COVID-19. EPCPH encourages symptom screening each day prior to attending school or child care.
 - If a child or student arrives at school or child care and appears ill, EPCPH recommends they should be kept separate from other staff and students and parents contacted immediately. Individuals caring for ill students or staff are recommended to be dressed in proper personal protective equipment (PPE), including N95 mask, gown, and gloves.
 - Common symptoms of COVID-19 can be found [here](#).
 - If there is a concern for COVID-19 or another communicable disease, please consult with

EPCPH's Communicable Disease Program at 719-578-3220 or after hours at 719-235-2278. Please leave a message for the quickest response. There is also an EPCPH inbox specific to school questions: [schools covid19@elpasoco.com](mailto:schoolscovid19@elpasoco.com).

- **Encourage staff and students to stay home when they are sick:** Identifying and separating students/staff exhibiting illness is critical to prevent the spread of disease. This requires clear expectations and communication with parents and staff. Consider implementing policies that allow ill employees the flexibility to stay home when sick.
- **Cohort style learning:** Limiting child-to-child interaction, particularly in children who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated, to a fixed, known group helps prevent spread of the virus between larger populations of children. Additionally, limiting interactions is also a critical tool in limiting the number of students potentially exposed, which require quarantine and exclusion from in-person learning. This strategy is important to the continuity of in-person learning and can be accomplished in many possible ways but will need to be age- and environment-appropriate. Note: Larger cohorts may result in larger numbers of students who will be asked to quarantine should a cohort member test positive for COVID-19.
 - Limit classes to as few students as staffing, space, and resources allow.
 - Keep students stationary and rotate teachers.
 - Cohort larger classes by recess, lunch, physical education, transportation etc.
 - Use assigned seating in all activities.
 - Consider hybrid learning approaches for older students to decrease cohort size.
- **Promote touch-free surfaces:** Reduce the frequency of touching surfaces or have dedicated supplies for each student.
- **Enhanced cleaning:** Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved cleaners and disinfectants for COVID-19, including but not limited to diluted bleach, 70 percent alcohol solutions, or other approved products for all touchable surfaces as indicated by the manufacturer. Disinfectants must also meet the requirements of the applicable school or child care regulations. Understand that many of the products are not appropriate for use by or in contact with young children. Ensure that the manufacturer's recommendations, including concentration and contact time, for each product is being followed to allow for adequate disinfection.
- **Airflow/ventilation:** Utilizing outdoor or open spaces as much as possible decreases the likelihood of high-dose exposure of infectious particles. Creative use of sports fields or outdoor school space is strongly encouraged. In indoor environments, opening of windows, use of fans, or increasing outdoor sourced ventilation is an effective means of reducing transmission. Nearly all large, publicized outbreaks are in indoor settings without spacing or face coverings and with minimal air movement.
 - When there is a public health crisis such as a pandemic, additional modifications to school operations are necessary, however, the fire code still must be adhered to.
 - Fire doors serve an important purpose in the event of a fire and can help to contain heat and smoke. Fire doors should be utilized in the manner intended and in accordance with the fire codes within the school's jurisdiction.
 - More information regarding Maintaining Fire Safety During a Pandemic can be found here: [Maintaining a Fire Safe School During a Pandemic](#).
- **Testing:** To minimize barriers to testing, all schools should identify PCR or antigen testing site options for referral of symptomatic students and faculty. The most up-to-date list of community testing sites in El Paso County can be found on EPCPH's website [here](#).

Recommended PCR tests include:

- Qualitative PCR or,
- Molecular tests like Abbott ID NOW.
 - *These tests do not require confirmatory testing; PCR is considered the gold standard test and is preferred when available.*

OR Antigen Point of Care (POC) or rapid tests such as:

- BinaxNOW
 - *Will almost always require confirmatory PCR for negative results.*

**** All positive results are considered cases and do not require confirmatory testing. A negative test result cannot override a positive test result when determining appropriate quarantine and/or isolation recommendations**

Other Considerations

Schools should evaluate the means available to them to support the emotional and mental health of the school community. Schools should develop tools and protocols (such as regularly scheduled check-ins, peer mentorship, individual learning plans/goal setting and outreach for identified concerns) to support the school community. Some community resources for managing mental and emotional needs can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 Related Closures

The success of our schools' and child cares' ability to safely sustain in-person learning this year will be driven largely by our community's success in preventing spread in greater El Paso County as well as the schools' and child cares' capacity to implement the above recommended preventative measures. Therefore, we must consider community-wide transmission rates as well as our hospital and public health capacity when determining whether in-person school is safe and reasonable.

- There is no formula for when a facility may need to consider a temporary pivot to e-learning. It may be a facility decision if it is determined that operations are not feasible due to reasons such as low staffing. For other scenarios, it would ultimately be a conversation between the facility and EPCPH on whether switching to e-learning is recommended to prevent ongoing COVID-19 transmission.

COVID-19 Related Special Topics

Throughout the pandemic schools have been flexible and adaptable and have successfully implemented many layers of protection for their school community. Below are additional measures that can be considered in your layered approach to prevention of disease transmission.

Bus transportation: Access to transportation is critical for schools and enhanced safety recommendations include the following:

- Encourage non-shared forms of transportation for families who are able.
- Ride sharing can be an effective option but would require considerations of cohorting.
- For children who require bus transportation, to reduce transmission, consider keeping windows open for ventilation, seating siblings together, cohorting by class, assigned seating, one person per seat if non-household contacts, or skipping rows (if appropriate or feasible) in combination or separately.
- Per the [CDC Order](#) for public transportation, which is subject to applicable exemptions and exclusions, bus

drivers and passengers must wear a mask if aged 2 and up. Bus interiors should be disinfected regularly and modified to minimize high-touch surfaces. Inability to identify exposed individuals and implement appropriate cohorting will result in the need to exclude a greater number of students and/or staff.

Class size: Currently, no definitive national or state guidelines exist regarding maximum class size or teacher to student ratios with respect to COVID-19. Schools are strongly encouraged to plan for the maximum spacing and minimal cohort size that is achievable given staffing, classroom space, school population, age, and activity. In situations where ideal spacing is not achievable, layered prevention strategies such as masking should be utilized. Keep in mind that the recommendation to limit the number of students and staff in cohorts will again lower the number of people needing to be excluded.

Recess: Free play and physical activity is critical to our youth's mental, physical, and social well-being. It is very challenging to maintain physical distancing in these environments, so cohorting of small playgroups, outdoor play, or organizing activities that encourage alternate forms of play such as running or 'shadow tag' are strongly encouraged.

Field trips: Experiential learning and application of knowledge are important to real world learning. Outdoors is much safer than indoors, so adventure is encouraged. Group transportation can be a challenge, so bus safety, masks, open windows, cohorting, and appropriate mitigation strategies for the destination are critical. Local hikes or trips around school grounds may offer benefits without the inherent risk of traditional field trips.

School lunches: There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmissible through food. However, the traditional communal eating experience of school lunch carries an increased risk of disease transmission. If cafeteria seating is necessary, effective strategies include staggered lunch shifts, spaced tables, cohorting, seating assignments, and physically distanced lines and seating arrangements.

Staff meetings or staff-only activities: It is suggested that schools keep groups of staff to a minimum. Physical distancing and face coverings are recommended during staff meetings and staff-only activities.

Visitors: Best practice is to limit the number of visitors, guest speakers, parents, or non-essential personnel. It is recommended that child cares follow the current visitor guidance issued by the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) and CDPHE.

Sports and Extracurriculars: Participating in sports and extracurriculars with and against other individuals, in any capacity during this pandemic, holds an inherent risk of possible infection for participants and risk of transmission to other individuals, such as their household members. Adherence to public health guidance is recommended to minimize risk and disruptions to scheduled activities. Organizers should be familiar with recommendations from their national, state, and local governing bodies regarding illness (including, but not limited to, COVID-19).

While the risk of viral transmission or an outbreak can never be eliminated, the consistent, appropriate, and strategic application of the prevention and mitigation strategies described above give each school the optimal chance at a successful 2021-2022 academic school year. This guidance will be updated when additional scientific or regulatory standards become available.

Resources

CDPHE, COVID-19 School Guidance

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/practical-guide-for-operationalizing-cdc-school-guidance>

Children's Hospital Colorado, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources

<https://www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/coronavirus-covid19-resources-updates/>

CDPHE, Vaccine Information

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/vaccine>

CDPHE, How to Quarantine

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/how-to-quarantine>

CDC, Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>