

Health and safety guidance for school reopening

During these challenging and uncertain times, trusted guidance to help reduce the risk of reopening schools is vital to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Geisinger encourages all schools to follow Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, as well as remain compliant with Department of Education and other regulatory guidelines. This is a constantly evolving situation and information can change rapidly.

A summary of current guidance includes:

- Symptom screening should be done by parents/guardians at home each morning before the school day. Schools may want to consider providing home thermometers, if funding is available. Educational materials should be provided on how to screen appropriately and the importance of keeping ill children at home and isolated. Screening should include several key components:
- **Symptom checking**
 - Student has one of the following new symptoms:
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
 - Fever (defined as 100.4°F/38.0°C or greater)
 - Chills or repeated shaking
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of taste or smell
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Diarrhea
- **Temperature checking**
 - A fever is 100.4°F or greater
- **Exposure**
 - Anyone who has had close, unprotected and prolonged contact with a known or suspected case of COVID-19 in past 14 days.

Children who either have symptoms, fever, or exposure to COVID-19, should not be sent on a bus or brought to school.

- All district staff should perform a symptom screening on themselves prior to leaving for work and should stay home if ill.
- PA Department of Health recommends that schools “conduct routine, daily health checks (e.g., temperature AND symptom screening) which include checks for history.” We recognize the

challenges logistically to do temperature and symptom screenings upon mass entry and the risk for queuing. However, if there are alternatives that would allow for temperature screening, it would be recommended. One potential example would be to continue to have children mask until they get into their classroom. Upon arrival in the classroom, they would wash their hands, be seated and get a temperature check by their classroom teacher. Any student with a temperature would remain masked and be dismissed to the school nurse (see screening workflow).

- Students and staff should consistently be made aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. Signage is available in our digital toolkit for handwashing and social distancing. In addition, we have included some ideas for interactive and fun handwashing approaches for classroom teachers. It is important to continuously reinforce messaging around handwashing, social distancing, masking and staying home if ill.
- Students should mask and proceed to the nurse immediately if they develop any symptoms for COVID-19. The nurse should have an area designated that the student can remain isolated from other students, while they are being evaluated and waiting for pick up. Once the student is picked up the area should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected per CDC guidance ([link](#)).
- In line with the PA DOH recommendations, all students should be masked in a school setting. Children should wear masks at all times particularly if physical distance beyond 6 feet cannot be maintained, and especially when changing classes, entering and exiting the building in large groups, while riding the bus or during other instances where social distancing cannot be achieved. Schools may need to consider having masks available for students who need masks replaced. Wearing masks when not able to social distance, is advised.
- Staff should mask, in accordance with PA DOH guidelines.
- While there is much discussion around the amount of space for social distancing, it is important to note that six feet is recommended by the PA DOH and CDC. It is particularly important in situations where masking is not occurring (ie in younger children who are unable to keep mask on). This is why some schools are considering smaller class sizes, half-day instruction with rotation of students, two days on/two days off, or reconfiguration of classrooms. Look for opportunities to use non didactic spaces (gymnasium, auditorium, outdoors) for instruction when possible. Would recommend facing all desks in the same direction to help mitigate risk.
- All high-touch surfaces should be disinfected regularly, including door handles, light switches, playground equipment, and student desks. Students should carry their own water or be given water and it is recommended that water fountains be closed off.
- All individuals in school should sanitize or wash their hands on a frequent basis. Hand sanitizer should be made available in all common areas, hallways, and/or in classrooms where sinks for handwashing are not available. We will also have educational videos and interactive handwashing program suggestions available in the digital toolkit.
- Classrooms and common areas should be ventilated with additional circulation of outdoor air when possible.
- Bus drivers should be masked at all times when transporting students. Students should also be masked while on the bus. Buses should be disinfected regularly, a minimum of daily. If parents have the opportunity to provide non bus transportation, to help limit riders on the buses, we would recommend doing so.
- When a confirmed case is identified, PA DOH should be involved. Schools should rely on DOH for instruction on the closure of classrooms or schools. Superintendents should reach out to their county or state DOH to ensure they are updated should a case be reported and then take guidance from there. Counties may differ, therefore working directly with the county agency is the best approach. The guidelines may also vary by county based on community spread and other factors.

- Contact tracing is still being addressed and we are waiting for guidance from DOH on what the requirements would be and what tools will be available. In general, schools should contact their local health department for further guidance if a positive case has been identified.
- High-traffic hallway use should be limited when feasible, by either staggering the end of classroom periods, creating one-way student traffic flow where possible, and reducing the number of students in the hallways at one time. Further risk can also be mitigated by masking in high traffic areas.
- PA DOH has provided clear recommendations that delivering meals in the classroom is preferred to avoid large numbers of unmasked children in close proximity in cafeterias.

This guidance provided by Geisinger is for reference purposes only. Schools are encouraged to consult directly with health care providers, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health when creating plans for reopening.

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