

Jefferson County Public Health COVID-19 School Setting Guidance

August 29, 2023

Jefferson County Public Health (JCPH) continues to recommend that the best protection against severe complications from COVID-19 and the best approach to maintain in-person learning and childcare is to get vaccinated AND received a booster dose if you are eligible. It is important that all individuals in a school setting understand their own risk and understand the steps to take to protect themselves and others. Though this guidance is written for COVID-19, many of the layered mitigation measures can also help to prevent the spread of other infectious diseases.

In this document, “school setting” includes all public and private schools, childcare settings, other educational settings for children, and institutions of higher education.

JCPH COVID-19 Protocol for Isolation (RECOMMENDED)

Isolation Definition:

Isolation is **recommended** pursuant to the legal authority set forth in C.R.S § 25-1.5-102(1) and § 25-1-506(3)(b). The terms of the recommendation are set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE):

- [Isolation](#) is for those who have tested positive using any diagnostic COVID-19 test for COVID-19 or developed symptoms after a COVID-19 exposure.
 - Those recommended to isolate should do so for a minimum of 5 days. Day 0 is considered the date of either symptom onset or the date of the positive test collection.
 - Earliest eligible return is on day 6 if the person has been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medication) and there has been significant improvement of symptoms.
 - JCPH recommends wearing a well-fitted mask for persons aged 3 and older for days 6-10 OR use two negative antigen tests to [determine when to end mask use](#). It is also strongly recommended to avoid those at high risk of getting severely ill with a COVID-19 infection.
 - Diagnostic COVID-19 test: a test that detects a current COVID-19 infection. These tests include PCR, rapid molecular, and antigen tests. A serology (antibody) test can check for evidence of past infection or evidence of a COVID-19 vaccination but cannot tell if a person has a current COVID-19 infection, therefore a serology test is not considered a diagnostic test.
 - CDPHE requires that the school setting must notify JCPH of positive COVID-19 cases.

Outbreaks in School Settings:

Outbreak definition in a school setting: Five or more people with COVID-19 (including individuals with unproctored antigen positive tests) with at least two confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 in a facility or (non-household) group with onset in a 14-day period.

The JCPH Infectious Disease Epidemiology program will assess outbreak status and mitigation measures in collaboration with school setting leadership.

JCPH Best Practice Recommendations for School Settings:

- Continue to communicate messaging on staying home when sick regardless of a negative COVID-19 test and ensure compliance with facility illness exclusion policies.
- Promote staff and students get vaccinated against COVID-19 and provide opportunities for employees to get vaccinated.
- Notify impacted classes or grades of increases in cases or outbreaks.
- Strong adherence to personal hygiene, to include frequent hand washing breaks and use of an alcohol base hand sanitizer where appropriate.
- While mask use is no longer required, they are still recommended by the CDC and CDPHE as a measure to reduce the risk of transmission in school settings after an exposure to COVID-19. JCPH endorses this guidance, especially in circumstances when a person chooses to wear one or in facilities that choose to continue to require mask use. Persons who are at higher risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection or persons otherwise concerned about being exposed to COVID-19 are especially encouraged to wear a well-fitted mask when indoors in school or other public settings. JCPH encourages the use of the CDC hospital admission levels as a guide for masking decisions.
- Eat in classrooms or outside.
 - If eating in classrooms, maximize ventilation by opening windows.
 - If eating in classrooms is not feasible, implement other means of avoiding crowded lunchrooms
 - Pre-plate lunches to avoid crowding in line
 - Stagger lunch periods to reduce numbers of students in each lunch period
 - Increase distancing between lunch tables to achieve 6ft distancing between students
- Increase ventilation in spaces to the maximum extent possible.
 - Work with facilities staff to ensure that the building's HVAC system is cycling at least 6 times/hr.
 - Utilize a [Box Fan Air Filter](#).
- Encourage testing on day 6 after a known exposure.
- Temporarily cancelling or moving to remote highest-risk activities in outbreak situations.
- Have a plan for remote learning and school setting closures if a high number of staff are out with illness, and the school setting cannot safely operate.

JCPH Best Practice Recommendations for [High-Risk Individuals in School Settings:](#)

- Be up to date on the COVID-19 vaccination.
- Both parties utilize a tight-fitting face mask, such as a KN95 or N95, when in close contact or in situations where 1:1 instruction is occurring.
- Allow high risk individuals to consume lunch in a location that allows for maximum spacing and air flow.
- Continue to use all best practices and required protocols for COVID-19 mitigation.
- Contact JCPH for an individualized consultation with JCPH's Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program.
- Suggest for caregivers and staff to consult with primary care physicians for individual risk assessments.
- Support individual families and staff who may choose a 10-day isolation based upon their individual risks and comfort level.
- Remind individuals that these recommendations should be adhered both in and outside of the school setting.

JCPH Mitigation Guidance Using CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level:

JCPH encourages school settings to utilize CDC’s [COVID-19 Hospital Admission Levels](#) and corresponding recommendations to aid in selection of COVID-19 mitigation strategies.

Note: School settings experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak should implement additional mitigation measures regardless of the CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level.

CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Levels and Associated Prevention Strategies:

CDC’s COVID-19 hospital admission levels help communities and individuals make decisions on what COVID-19 prevention strategies to use based on whether their community’s COVID-19 hospital admissions are classified as low, medium, or high. The CDC COVID-19 hospital admission levels treat school settings the same as other settings in the community. School settings should follow guidance based on the CDC COVID-19 hospital admission levels of the community in which they are located.

COVID-19 hospital admissions levels	Low	Medium	High
New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	<10.0	10.0-19.9	≥20.0

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_new-admissions-rate-county

School setting program administrators should work with JCPH to consider other local conditions and factors when deciding to implement prevention strategies. For example, school setting-specific indicators—such as student and staffing levels or student and staff vaccination rates—can help with decision-making. Additional community-level indicators that might be considered for use in decision making about COVID-19 prevention are pediatric hospitalizations, results from [wastewater surveillance](#), or other local information.

When the CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level is at level medium or high, school settings should consider adding layered prevention strategies, described in the links below, to maintain safe, in-person learning and keep the school setting safely open. School settings may choose to add layered prevention strategies at any CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level, based on local or facility needs.

If a school setting is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak, the JCPH Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program will consult with the setting on mitigation measures, regardless of the CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level. School settings may put in place prevention strategies recommended at medium and high CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Levels (for example, masks) even if the community the school setting is in a lower CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level.

With low CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Levels, school settings can consider removing prevention strategies one at a time, followed by close monitoring of the CDC COVID-19 Hospital Admission Level in the weeks that follow.

Helpful Links:

- JCPH: [Jefferson County COVID-19 Information](#)
- CDPHE: [How Sick is Too Sick](#)
- CDC: [Operational Guidance for Schools K-12 and ECE](#) and [Community and Individual Prevention Strategies by Hospital Admission Level](#)