

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE K-12 SCHOOLS AND CHILD CARE SETTINGS RELEASED JULY 30, 2021

Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every facet of our society and has taken an enormous toll. As of July 30, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 Data Tracker (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographics>) reported there have been 34,722,631 COVID-19 cases and 609,853 COVID-19 deaths in our nation and the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) COVID-19 Data webpage (<https://covid19.colorado.gov/data>) reported there have been 573,907 COVID-19 cases and 7,202 deaths due to COVID-19 in our state.

All Jefferson County community members have faced enormous challenges and have been asked to make unprecedented sacrifices, including schools and schoolchildren. Over the past year and a half, despite school's unprecedented and heroic efforts to provide remote learning, the multiple disruptions to in-person educational activities resulted in far too many students struggling academically. When this virus first emerged, public health and medical professionals worked tirelessly to learn as much as possible as quickly as possible to provide guidance to our communities, businesses, schools, etc. Despite these efforts, it proved difficult to strike the right balance between mitigating viral transmission to protect life and health and supporting our communities' economic needs, educational needs, and physical and mental wellness needs.

A great deal has been learned about this novel virus over the past year and a half, including how it spreads and what containment strategies are most effective. As a result, newly released evidence-based guidance is expected to limit viral transmission while emphasizing and prioritizing in-person educational activities. Schools can feel empowered to have evidence-based strategies they can put in place to avoid, or at least substantively minimize, the number of disruptions due to isolation, quarantine and outbreaks.

Objective of Jefferson County Public Health Guidance:

Jefferson County Public Health (JCPH) provides this guidance for K-12 public and private schools and child care settings to protect the health and safety of our schoolchildren, school faculty and staff and families of schoolchildren as well as the rest of our Jeffco community members. Jeffco schools are integral members of our communities and as such the approach schools take to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic affect all others in our community. JCPH is committed to emphasizing, prioritizing and protecting schoolchildren's rights to safely participate in in-person educational activities and extracurricular activities while we remain committed to our mission to protect the health and safety of all who live, work, learn and recreate in Jeffco.

Current National and State Public Health and Medical Guidance:

Public health and medical leaders at the national and state levels have recently released updated school guidance. There is now strong evidence supporting this guidance. All of these

evidence-based guidelines emphasize the need for a layered viral mitigation approach rooted in increasing vaccination coverage for all eligible students, faculty and staff and requiring masks in indoor settings for all individuals, regardless of vaccination status. JCPH supports the current school guidance provided by these medical and public health authorities and strongly urges Jefferson County schools follow these guidelines, particularly with respect to vaccination and masking.

Examples include:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has released updated guidance (<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>) which includes:
 - “All eligible individuals should receive the COVID-19 vaccine.”
 - “All students older than 2 years and all school staff should wear face masks at school (unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit use).”
- The CDC has released updated guidance (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>) and (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>) which include:
 - “CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Children should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with layered prevention strategies in place.”
 - “Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.”
- CDPHE has released updated guidance ([Roadmap To In-Person Learning- FINAL.pdf - Google Drive](#)) which includes:
 - “Provide clear messaging on the vaccine and its safety, effectiveness and importance to our return to normalcy, including sharing talking points for schools to share with parents and their communities.”
 - “Continue to support the CDC, CDPHE and CDE strong recommendation for all children ages 3 and over to wear a mask.”
- The CDC also released an updated Science Brief on transmission of COVID-19 in K-12 schools (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html) which provides citations to the current best evidence supporting these policies and which includes:
 - “Children and adolescents can be infected with SARS-CoV-2, can get sick with COVID-19 and can spread the virus to others.”
 - “In the United States through March 2021, the estimated cumulative rates of SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 symptomatic illness in children ages 5-17 years were comparable to infection and symptomatic illness rates in adults ages 18-49 and higher than rates in adults ages 50 and older.”
 - “Early during the COVID-19 pandemic, children were not commonly identified as index cases in household or other clusters largely because schools and extracurricular activities around the world were closed or no longer held in-person. However, outbreaks among adolescents attending camps, sports events

and schools have demonstrated that adolescents can transmit SARS-CoV-2 to others.”

- “Although outbreaks in schools can occur, multiple studies have shown that transmission within school settings is typically lower than – or at least similar to – levels of community transmission, when prevention strategies are in place in schools.”
- “Team sports or other types of group extracurricular activities can increase the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission for participants, coaches and spectators as well as among other students, teachers and staff.”

Jefferson County Public Health School Guidance:

In-person Educational Activities:

All Jefferson County schools should follow current medical and public health guidelines to mitigate COVID-19 transmission. This is critical to limit disruptions to in-person educational activities over the 2021/22 school year. In-person educational activities must be emphasized and protected and thus should be prioritized over extracurricular activities. Schools should adopt evidence-based strategies to keep their students, faculty and staff as safe and healthy as possible and to avoid, or at least minimize, the number of disruptions due to isolations, quarantines and outbreaks.

- Each school should strongly promote COVID-19 vaccination.
 - Vaccination rates among faculty and staff should be nearly 100%, with only individuals who have documented medical or religious exemptions remaining unvaccinated at the start of the 2021/22 school year.
 - Vaccination rates among eligible students, those 12 years of age and older, should be at least 70% at the start of the 2021/22 school year.
 - Vaccination rates among volunteers and visitors should be 100% throughout the 2021/22 school year. Unvaccinated individuals should not be allowed to endanger in-person educational activities.
- In each school all individuals should be required to wear masks when indoors, regardless of vaccination status.
 - When masks must be removed by students to participate in high risk activities (e.g., playing a band instrument, participating in a sport in which masks may not be worn, etc.), the activity should be conducted outside if at all possible and, if activities cannot be conducted outside, physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be consistently enforced. If moving the activity outside or providing adequate distancing is not possible, schools should cancel those high risk activities.
 - When masks must be removed by students to eat or drink, physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be consistently enforced.
 - When masks must be removed by faculty or staff to eat or drink, physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be consistently enforced.
- Each school should implement a COVID-19 testing policy.
 - Schools should review their health and safety policies and ensure they include a requirement that students’ parents/guardians report positive COVID-19 test results to the school health office.

- All individuals experiencing symptoms of illness, regardless of their vaccination status, should be required to leave school and to take a molecular/PCR COVID-19 test and present a negative result before being allowed to return to school.
- All unvaccinated individuals quarantined due to exposure (i.e., identification as a close contact of a case) should be required to take a COVID-19 test and present a negative result before being allowed to return to school if choosing the shortened 7-day quarantine period over the preferred 10- or 14-day quarantine periods.
- Schools should implement a surveillance system which requires all unvaccinated faculty and staff be tested at least weekly throughout the 2021/22 school year and to present negative test results to continue attending school.
- Schools should implement a surveillance system which requires all unvaccinated students participating in school-based extracurricular activities be tested at least weekly throughout the 2021/22 school year and to present negative test results to continue participation in the extracurricular activity.
- Schools should follow recommendations outlined in the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's [Back to School Roadmap](#) to layer as many additional precautionary measures as feasible to keep their students, faculty and staff as safe and healthy as possible and to avoid, or at least minimize, the number of disruptions due to isolations, quarantines and outbreaks.

In-person School-Based Extracurricular Activities:

In-person educational activities are so critical to schoolchildren that all efforts must be made to avoid their disruption. Thus, although school-based extracurricular activities are acknowledged for the positive effect they have on schoolchildren's overall health and wellness, these extra activities must not be allowed to endanger undisrupted in-person educational activities. Because in-person educational activities must be emphasized, prioritized and protected over school-based extracurricular activities, JCPH strongly recommends increased expectations for viral mitigation strategy compliance among those participating in school-based extracurricular activities.

- All adults participating in school-based extracurricular activities should be vaccinated, including coaches, officials, adult volunteers, etc., to keep schoolchildren as safe as possible and to prioritize in-person educational activities. Unvaccinated individuals should not be allowed to endanger in-person educational activities.
- All eligible students without a documented medical or religious exemption participating in school-based extracurricular activities should be vaccinated to keep all schoolchildren as safe as possible and to emphasize, prioritize and protect in-person educational activities.
- If a school ignores this strong recommendation that all students and adults participating in school-based extracurricular activities be vaccinated, the school should implement a testing policy as outlined above.

Isolation and Quarantine:

Ensuring COVID-19 cases stay home is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19 and, under state law, isolation of positive cases is required and must be enforced by local public health and school officials. Further, isolation and quarantine remain important to viral mitigation efforts. JCPH recognizes there must be balance between viral mitigation strategies and the need to eliminate, or at least minimize, disruptions to in-person learning and school-based

extracurricular activities, however, isolation and quarantine are too critical to viral mitigation to make exceptions.

Note: Individuals who are fully vaccinated are not required to quarantine if identified as a close contact, but they must isolate if they test positive for COVID-19.

Note: Individuals who are not fully vaccinated but who have lab-confirmed PCR/antigen test indicating COVID-19 illness within 90 days prior to exposure to a case are not required to quarantine if identified as a close contact.

Note: Individuals who are not fully vaccinated but who were fully masked at the time of a school-based exposure to another fully masked individual who tested positive for COVID-19 are not required to quarantine if identified as a close contact.

- Regardless of vaccination status, all individuals who test positive for COVID-19 are required to follow isolation instructions.
- Unvaccinated individuals (including all students, faculty and staff) who were unmasked at the time of their exposure are required to quarantine if identified as a close contact of a COVID-19 case (Note: CDPHE has instituted a more lenient definition of a close contact for exposure that occurs in the school setting, which utilizes 3 ft. rather than 6 ft. distancing.)
 - JCPH does not endorse the CDPHE guidance that quarantine is not necessary for close contacts exposed in the school setting if county vaccination coverage is equal to or over 70%. All unvaccinated individuals who were unmasked at the time of exposure are expected to quarantine when identified as a close contact of a COVID-19 case. This expectation is equally applied across all sectors of our Jeffco community.
 - JCPH supports the CDC and CDPHE adopted shortened quarantine guidelines for asymptomatic contacts only.
 - A 7-day quarantine period with a negative test conducted after day 5, OR
 - A 10-day quarantine period.
- Under state law schools are required to work with public health authorities to investigate cases and outbreaks and JCPH will continue to monitor outbreaks and other indicators of high levels of COVID-19 transmission within schools.
 - JCPH will issue isolation and quarantine orders as cases and outbreaks are identified.
 - JCPH will issue school closure orders if levels of COVID-19 transmission within a school reach levels high enough to be considered a public health emergency.
 - JCPH will work with schools to encourage voluntary action be taken by the school to avoid closures when possible.
 - JCPH will work with CDPHE and schools when school closure orders are required.

Testing:

Testing enables schools to monitor the effectiveness of their viral mitigation efforts and to identify and quickly respond to outbreaks and other evidence of COVID-19 transmission within students, faculty and staff.

- Each school should implement a testing policy.
 - All individuals experiencing symptoms of illness, regardless of their vaccination status, should be required to take a molecular/PCR COVID-19 test and present a negative result before being allowed to return to school.
 - All unvaccinated individuals quarantined due to exposure (i.e., identification as a close contact of a case) should be required to take a COVID-19 test and present a negative result before being allowed to return to school if choosing the shortened 7-day quarantine period over the preferred 10- or 14-day quarantine periods.
 - Schools should implement a surveillance system which requires all unvaccinated faculty and staff be tested at least weekly throughout the 2021/22 school year and to present negative test results to continue attending school.
 - Schools should implement a surveillance system which requires all unvaccinated students participating in extracurricular activities be tested at least weekly throughout the 2021/22 school year and to present negative test results to continue participation in the extracurricular activity.

Working with Public Health Authorities:

All Jefferson County Schools *are required* to work with Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and Jefferson County Public Health authorities. Both local and state public health authorities have statutory, legal and regulatory authority to investigate and control disease transmission, including isolation of cases and quarantine of close contacts, closing public places and prohibiting gathering to control the spread of disease. Statutory citations include but are not limited to 25-1.5-102(1), 25-1-506(3)(b)(V), 25-1-122(2), 25-1.5-101(1)(a), (h), (k) and (l), C.R.S. Regulatory authority includes, 6 CCR 1009-1, 6 CCR 1010-6 and 6 CCR 1010-7.

Jefferson County Public Health prefers to collaborate with Jefferson County schools to promote public health efforts to keep schoolchildren as safe and healthy as possible while emphasizing, prioritizing and protecting in-person educational activities. This includes promoting COVID-19 viral mitigation best practices as outlined in this document. JCPH will alert schools throughout the academic year if medical and public health guidance is updated. Schools are expected to voluntarily follow current medical and public health guidance to mitigate COVID-19 transmission in order to protect student, faculty and staff health and safety while emphasizing, prioritizing and protecting in-person educational activities.

Jefferson County Public Health will attempt to implement all State statutes and, if schools are not voluntarily compliant, will take legal action up to and including issuing public health orders such as isolation, quarantine or closure orders and defending those orders in court.

Empowering Parents/Caregivers to Make Decisions Regarding Their Children's Health and Safety:

All Jefferson County schools work hard to ensure the health and safety of the schoolchildren in their charge and JCPH appreciates how hard Jeffco schools have worked and how diligently they have prepared for a safe return to in-person educational and school-based extracurricular activities this fall. However, it is ultimately up to parents/caregivers to determine if they believe their child will be safe at school as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Thus, parents/caregivers require access to information to be empowered to make decisions they feel are in their children's best health and safety interest. Schools should be fully transparent regarding their COVID-19 viral mitigation efforts.

- Each school should publicly post vaccination rates among their faculty and staff. Schools may contact JCPH for recommendations regarding how best to operationalize this recommendation.
- Each school should publicly post vaccination rates among their students. Schools may contact JCPH for recommendations regarding how best to operationalize this recommendation.
- Each school should publicly post their masking policy.
- Each school should publicly post their testing policy.
- Each school should publicly post information regarding additional efforts put in place to follow the recommendations outlined in the CDC and CDPHE guidelines to layer multiple viral mitigation strategies.
- Parents are strongly encouraged to contact district or school leaders to express their expectation that schools follow current medical and public health guidance if they do not feel safe sending their child back to school this fall after reviewing the viral mitigation efforts put in place by their school.
- Parents who are concerned about their child's safety at school should feel empowered to make decisions they feel are in their children's best health and safety interest.
 - Parents may consider remote learning.
 - Parents may consider moving their child to a school with higher vaccination coverage.
 - Parents may consider moving their child to a school with a universal masking policy.