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GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor

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TO: All Californians

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K–12 Schools to Support Safe In-Person Learning, 2022–2023 School Year

RELATED MATERIALS: Safe Schools for All Hub | Guidance for the Use of Face Masks | Guidance for Individuals Infected with or Exposed to COVID-19 | COVID-19 Outbreak Definitions | COVID-19 Testing at Schools | State Public Health Officer Order regarding School Workers

Updates as of September 30, 2022:

- Guidance updated to reflect extension of COVID-19 supplemental paid sick leave requirements through December 31, 2022.

Preamble

This guidance is intended to support safe, in-person learning in K–12 schools and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Disease management strategies in K–12 schools are guided by the principle that safe, in-person learning is critical to student well-being and development.

COVID-19 is here to stay, but we have learned methods and gained tools to decrease its impact on our health and well-being. California's schools can manage this disease in sustainable and adaptive manners. In alignment with the state's SMARTER plan, California will continue to provide resources—including COVID-19 tests and personal protective equipment—to support these goals and prevent broad disruption to in-person learning.

Additionally, many of the strategies used to address COVID-19 can protect school communities from other diseases and support healthy learning environments. In alignment with the CDC, California schools should consider the approaches described below as potential methods to also safeguard students and staff from other airborne pathogens, allergens, and pollutants (e.g., wildfire smoke).

The guidance is based on current scientific knowledge and anticipated trends. It is subject to change, as COVID-19 conditions can shift rapidly and our response in schools must remain nimble and responsive to dynamic challenges.

General Considerations:

1. The guidance is effective July 1, 2022, unless otherwise stated, and will continue to be reviewed regularly by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).
2. For ease of reference, the guidance includes information about certain relevant requirements outside of CDPH authority. See the linked sources noted within Required Actions below for more details.
3. California affirms the authority of local health departments and local educational agencies to maintain or establish additional guidance, including required actions, for K–12 school settings in their respective jurisdictions. When making a determination of whether additional measures are warranted to mitigate in-school transmission of COVID-19, CDPH recommends local health and education officials confer and review this guidance, relevant local considerations, and CDC guidance.
4. In workplaces, employers are subject to the Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS) or in some workplaces the Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard, and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.
5. When applying this guidance, consideration should be given to the direct school population and the surrounding community. Factors include:
 - CDC community level indicators of COVID-19 and their trajectory;
 - COVID-19 vaccination coverage in the community and among students, teachers, and staff;
 - local COVID-19 outbreaks or transmission patterns;
 - indoor air quality at relevant facilities;
 - availability and accessibility of resources, including masks and tests;
 - ability to provide therapeutics in a timely and equitable manner as they become available;
 - equity considerations, including populations disproportionately impacted by and exposed to COVID-19;
 - local demographics, including serving specialized populations of individuals at high risk of severe disease and immunocompromised populations; and
 - community input, including from students, families, and staff.
6. It is recommended that schools communicate to students, parents, staff, and the broader school community about the measures in place to safeguard health and well-being. This can include direct dissemination of safety plans (e.g., via email), providing information for students to take home to their families, and/or posting plans on a school's website or around campus. Communication should be cognizant of languages spoken and literacy levels of community members.

Mitigation Strategies

Staying Up to Date on Vaccinations:

Vaccinations prevent illness by working with the body's natural defenses to help safely develop immunity to disease. Not only do vaccinations provide individual-level protection, but high vaccination coverage reduces the burden of disease in schools and communities and may help protect individuals who are not vaccinated or those who may not develop a strong immune response from vaccination.

1. Recommended Actions:

- a. California strongly recommends that all eligible individuals get vaccinated against COVID-19 and remain up-to-date to protect oneself and reduce transmission of the virus.
- b. Additionally, children have fallen behind on receiving other vaccines over the course of pandemic, placing them and their communities at increased risk of falling ill from other vaccine-preventable illnesses. Schools should review statutory requirements for vaccination requirements for entry into K–12 schools and visit Shots for School for information.

Optimizing Indoor Air Quality:

The risk of getting COVID-19 is greater in indoor settings with poor air quality. Effective ventilation and filtration can curb the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. It may also protect students and staff from exposure to wildfire smoke and other airborne allergens and pollutants.

1. Recommended Actions:

- a. Follow CDPH recommendations to improve indoor air quality to mitigate against COVID-19 in K–12 schools. Facility maintenance staff may also review technical considerations (PDF).
- b. In circumstances where outdoor air quality is poor (such as from wildfire smoke), schools are encouraged to confer with local health officials to determine the best approach forward. Considerations include access to the following:
 - air filtration strategies that do not rely on outdoor air sources (e.g., portable air cleaners);
 - higher quality facemasks (e.g., N95, KN95, or KF94 respirators);
 - alternative spaces with better air quality to host in-person learning
 - alternative ways to commute to/from school; and
 - local COVID-19 epidemiologic factors (i.e., vaccination coverage status, community case rates).

For more information, see resources and guidance from the California Department of Education and the California Air Resources Board.

Using Facemasks:

Masks, particularly high-quality and well-fitting masks (PDF), remain highly effective, inexpensive, and dynamic tools to protect oneself and mitigate transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

1. Required Actions:

- a. No person can be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into a school, unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard (e.g., watersports).
- b. Schools must develop and implement local protocols to provide masks to students who inadvertently fail to bring a face covering to school and desire to use one.

2. Recommended Actions:

- a. Unless otherwise directed by local health departments or local educational agencies, students and staff should follow CDPH masking guidance for the general public, as well as masking guidance for specific situations referenced below (e.g., when having symptoms, being infected, or exposed).

Getting Tested for COVID-19:

Testing remains a key mitigation layer to detect and curb transmission of COVID-19. Schools are encouraged to ensure access to COVID-19 testing for students and staff, particularly for vulnerable communities. Schools should review support and resources offered by the California COVID-19 Testing Task Force, as well as those available through healthcare insurers, local, and federal sources.

1. Recommended Actions:

- a. CDPH recommends that antigen tests be considered the primary option for detecting COVID-19 in schools, compared to PCR tests. For more information, see the Testing Framework for K–12 Schools.
- b. Due to the increased travel and social interactions that often occurs during school-breaks, it is recommended that students and staff get tested for COVID-19 prior to returning to school following major breaks (e.g., summer, winter, spring).
- c. Additional testing recommendations are referenced in relevant sections below.

Maintaining Clean Hands:

Hand hygiene can prevent the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

1. Recommended Actions:

- a. Schools should teach and reinforce proper handwashing to lower the risk of spreading viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19.
- b. Schools should ensure adequate supplies to support hand hygiene behaviors, including soap, tissues, no-touch trashcans, and hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent alcohol for staff and children who can safely use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizers should be stored up, away, and out of sight of younger children and should be used only with adult supervision for children ages 5 years and younger.

- c. Schools should teach and reinforce covering coughs and sneezes to help keep individuals from getting and spreading infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

Managing Individuals with Symptoms:

Staying home when sick can lower the risk of spreading infectious diseases, including COVID-19, to other people.

1. Required Actions:

- a. California requires employers to provide COVID-19 supplemental paid sick leave for most workers through December 31, 2022. This includes circumstances in which workers are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and seeking a medical diagnosis, attending a vaccine appointment for themselves or for a family member, and/or if a worker's child is isolating due to COVID-19 infection.

2. Recommended Actions:

- a. K-12 schools are encouraged to develop standard criteria for managing students who develop symptoms of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. In most situations, any student who develops new, unexplained symptoms should not return to campus until it is clear that symptoms are mild and improving or are due to a non-infectious cause (e.g., allergies). This includes waiting until 24 hours have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- b. Additionally, if symptoms are concerning for COVID-19, it is strongly recommended that students wear a mask and get tested immediately. Students should also follow CDPH recommendations for retesting and/or isolating if results are positive.
- c. Schools should avoid policies that incentivize coming to school while sick.

Reporting COVID-19 disease burden to local health authorities:

Notifying local health authorities of the disease burden in schools can expedite deployment of additional strategies and resources to manage illness and contain transmission and outbreaks.

1. Required Actions:

- a. K–12 schools should refer to California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 17, §2500 and §2508 for reporting requirements. Note that 17 CCR §2500 has been temporarily modified by the State Public Health Officer Order of February 10th, 2022.
- b. As workplaces, schools are subject to COVID-19 workplace outbreak reporting requirements stipulated in AB 685 and Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards.

Managing Students Diagnosed with COVID-19:

Prompt management of students with COVID-19 can prevent further spread and, in some cases, allow for early treatment.

1. Recommended Action:

- a. Students diagnosed with COVID-19 should follow recommendations listed in Table 1 (Persons with COVID-19) of CDPH's guidance for the general public, including staying home for at least 5 days and wearing a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days, especially in indoor settings.

Managing Students Exposed to COVID-19:

Prompt notification to students and families regarding exposure to infectious diseases, including COVID-19, can allow for rapid testing, early treatment, and prevention of further spread.

1. Recommended Actions:

- a. It is recommended that families notify schools if their child has COVID-19 and was on school grounds during their infectious period, and that schools in turn notify students who spent more than a cumulative total of 15 minutes (within a 24-hour time period) in a shared indoor airspace (e.g., classroom) with someone with COVID-19 during their infectious period.
- b. In lieu of individual exposure notifications, schools should consider providing a general notification to the entire school community during times of elevated community transmission of COVID-19. This communication can alert all to the increased potential of being exposed to COVID-19 due to a rise in cases among school and community members, and remind all to monitor for symptoms and get tested.
- c. All students with known exposure to persons with COVID-19 should follow recommendations listed in Table 2 (Asymptomatic Persons Who are Exposed to Someone with COVID-19) of CDPH's guidance for the general public. If they remain without symptoms, students may continue to take part in all aspects of K–12 schooling including sports and extracurricular activities. As recommended in Table 2, they should wear a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days and get tested 3–5 days after last exposure.

Managing COVID-19 Outbreaks:

CDPH will continue to support local health and education officials in managing suspected or confirmed outbreaks of COVID-19.

1. Recommended Actions:

- a. Broad disruptions to in-person learning, such as temporary school or classroom closures, due to COVID-19 should remain a last resort and considered only after all available resources have been exhausted, and only after conferring with local health officials.
- b. Local public health officials are encouraged to contact CDPH to learn more about consultation, testing and vaccination resources to support management of COVID-19 outbreaks.

Cleaning Facilities:

In general, routine cleaning is enough to sufficiently remove the virus that causes COVID-19 from surfaces. If disinfectants are used, use asthma-safer products.

1. Recommended action:

- a. Drinking fountains may be open and used by students and staff. Routine cleaning is recommended.

Additional Considerations

1. **Considerations to address student mental and behavioral health:** Schools are encouraged to implement strategies to address student mental and behavioral health. Schools should review guidance and resources available to support social and emotional learning and mental health resources for youth, including California's Healthy Minds, Thriving Kids Project.
2. **Considerations for students with disabilities or other health care needs:** When implementing this guidance, schools should carefully consider how to address the legal requirements related to provision of a free appropriate public education and requirements to reasonably accommodate disabilities, which continue to apply. For additional recommendations for students with disabilities or other health care needs, refer to guidance provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
3. **Considerations for higher risk activities:** Certain activities that involve increased and forceful exhalation can pose increased risk for getting and spreading COVID-19, particularly if conducted indoors, in poorly ventilated settings, and/or without the use of masks. Accordingly, schools may consider implementing additional measures to mitigate transmission in these settings, including screening testing and vaccination, particularly during COVID-19 outbreaks or surges.
4. **Considerations for large events at K–12 schools:** Particularly during surges of COVID-19, school dances, large assemblies, and other school-based crowded events, especially those held indoors, all have the potential to cause substantial spread of COVID-19 within and beyond the school community. Prior to hosting large events, schools are encouraged to review the Safe and SMART Events Playbook (PDF) for mitigation strategies that should be considered.
5. **Considerations for visitors to K–12 schools:** Schools should not limit access for essential direct service providers who comply with school visitor policies due to a concern about mitigating spread of COVID-19.

6. Considerations for boarding schools and programs that may operate residential

components: Participants in activities with a residential component are at increased risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 to one another. Accordingly, they should consider all the layered mitigation strategies described in this guidance, especially recommendations to get vaccinated and undergo testing for COVID-19 prior to returning to school following major breaks (e.g., summer, winter, spring).

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