

Missouri Center for Public Health Excellence Minimum School Opening and Closing Recommendations

Background

The Missouri Center for Public Health Excellence is an organization of public health departments dedicated to the improvement of public health services in Missouri. It is not our purpose or intention to mandate any type of activity to be followed by either public health departments or school districts in the state of Missouri. We recognize that the Missouri School Board Association has issued a detailed document to assist school districts in their development of a plan for providing elementary and secondary education in a safe and healthy environment once schools reopen.

We further recognize that every school district and local public health department faces very unique situations specific to the number of students to be served, number of buildings in the district, and the availability of transportation and feeding mechanisms. There is no one standard plan that will fit the needs of every district. Each school district whether public or private must develop its own plan that meets the needs of its faculty, staff, parents, and students. Local public health departments stand ready to assist in this planning, but we are not here to dictate how to provide educational services.

In order to assist and be sure that school districts and public health departments have some minimum guidelines as they work together to open the schools in their location and to be sure that these schools are able to stay open we offer some minimum recommendations.

Fundamentals

MOCPE expects school districts to maintain social distance, increase cleaning of commonly touched surfaces, increase personal hygiene education, focusing on Cover Your Cough and Handwashing, education on COVID-19, including stigma reduction, and actively monitor their schools. Schools within Missouri are encouraged to work together to create and engineer controls that can mitigate the risk of transmission and setup procedures when a person tests positive within their school community. MOCPE also encourages school districts when developing/revising their plans to utilize the hierarchy of control pyramid to mitigate COVID-19, and all other risks within their specific school district/schools/buildings/classes.

The overall plans should include the following:

- Cleaning and disinfection protocols.

- Identify and plan for vulnerable staff and students, especially people 60 and over and those who are medically vulnerable.
- Identify and plan for staff duties that require close contact.
- An absenteeism plan for staff and students whose parents do not feel comfortable returning their student to school and for students who show symptoms of the coronavirus.
- A communications plan for informing parents and staff of the school district and charter school response plans, protocols and policies to manage the impact of the coronavirus.
- A point of contact for each school district and charter school for effective communication and collaboration with local public health officials.
- A review of reopening plans in consultation with local public health officials.

Minimum Recommendations for Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Department of Health and Senior Services

In order for schools to be sure that ill students really have COVID-19 and not some other illness mimicking the symptoms of COVID-19 testing needs to be available for any student. This will reduce the number of students who have to be quarantined or isolated and allow for the continuity of education and reduction of worry by all involved in the educational system.

Minimum Recommendations for School Districts and Public Health Departments

- If there is a COVID-19 case: identify who the individual was in contact with, within a 6-foot space, for at least 15 minutes. If specific contacts cannot be identified, quarantine everyone who was in the same room, bus or other area they were in. Schools will need to keep room/bus logs or photos in order to do this contact tracing. By having seating chart, bus seating charts or photos the number of students needing to be quarantined can be minimized.
- Schools should partner with their local public health agency to identify thresholds for determining when a classroom or facility should suspend in-person learning. Thresholds should focus on disease presence and risk of additional exposure within the individual classrooms. Establishing baseline thresholds for consideration is recommended, but situations should be determined individually, based on the details available. Thresholds should be higher for smaller populations and should focus on the percent who are identified as cases, and not inclusive of those in quarantine.

- School districts are encouraged to establish and maintain a set of community and organizational indicators for COVID-19 that will determine if a school district should pivot to temporary online learning. In September 2020, the CDC provided guidance on key indicators to help inform the appropriate response for districts. Schools and local public health agencies are encouraged to utilize this guidance and other key relevant community-specific data points to inform district-wide decisions.
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html?fbclid=IwAR0Hn8ddOlum5zdTp7URY-PUo5_HVoXteXb3yYdHDK_ep6wOy9wk02K1UVo
- Schools will need to make sure they have a space to isolate a sick student or staff member until they can leave.
- May close for 1-2-day for cleaning and disinfection of a school building or exposed area if unable to clean during the nighttime closing, in the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the staff or student in that building.

Minimum Immunization Recommendations for School Districts and Public Health Departments

- COVID-19 has not removed the need for regular school admission immunizations. These requirements may be found at <https://health.mo.gov/living/wellness/immunizations/pdf/2021schoolrequirements.pdf>
- With the continued spread of COVID-19 and the lack of an associated vaccine to prevent this virus we highly recommend that all School Districts and Public Health Departments work together to develop a joint plan to assist all students to be vaccinated for influenza this year. As symptoms of COVID-19 and influenza are very similar, all student, faculty member, or staff members should obtain all recommended vaccinations. This will help to increase school attendance by decreasing absenteeism caused by non-COVID-19 disease and help decrease the number of people quarantined/isolated unnecessarily.

It is our goal to have the most productive and least intrusive school year. CDC states "Ensuring that routine vaccination is maintained or reinitiated during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for protecting individuals and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks. Routine vaccination prevents illnesses that lead to unnecessary medical visits, hospitalizations and further strain the healthcare system. For the upcoming influenza season, influenza vaccination will be paramount to reduce the impact of respiratory illnesses in the population and resulting burdens on the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic." The co-existence of COVID-19 and influenza may cause high numbers of absenteeism. With these things in mind we strongly recommend influenza vaccination for all who can medically receive it.

Additional Considerations

Information concerning COVID-19 is changing daily in each of our communities. With this in mind it is more important than ever for Local Public Health Department and Local School Districts are working together for appropriate social distancing, appropriate mask wearing, and where economically feasible that virus guards are installed. That a joint plan has been developed to be be sure that you have a way to assure that proper isolation and quarantine of exposed and diagnosed students, staff and faculty can take place. That there is a way to communicate the identity of students, staff and faculty that have the virus so that if there is a large outbreak that joint contract tracing and education can be done. A method of virtual education should be available if this becomes necessary in your community either due to the community spread or the number of students who are exposed or ill from the virus.