

This page is being continuously updated. If you've opened this document more than once, please clear your history/cache and refresh the page to view the most up-to-date version.

All new/updated information is highlighted throughout this FAQ.

[General](#)

[Physical Standards](#)

[Athletics/Extracurricular](#)

[Symptom Monitoring](#)

[Environmental Cleaning and Personal Hygiene](#)

[Transportation](#)

[Additional Operational Considerations](#)

[Teaching and Learning: School Reopening Best Practices](#)

[Vaccination Information](#)

General

Q: What guidance for school operations during the 2021-2022 school year is available?

A: Working with the Louisiana Department of Health, LDOE has [provided guidance and best practices](#) for reopening schools in a safe manner for 2021-2022. This guidance consists of a Public Health guidance, best practices, planning template and to aid schools in maintaining in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 school year.

Q: Who should school systems contact for further information surrounding the released [Ready to Achieve Operational Guidelines](#)?

A: School systems should email LDOECOVID19support@la.gov for questions surrounding the released [Ready to Achieve Operational Guidelines](#)

Q: Who should school systems contact for answers to specific questions related to their system or school site?

A: School systems should consult with their [Regional Office of Public Health](#) officials for further guidance and answers to specific questions. Outreach to Regional Medical Directors should come from Superintendent level leadership or equivalent.

Q: Can before and after school care programs continue?

A: Afterschool programs may continue but must adhere to maximum group sizes and physical distance protocols. For younger students unable to maintain physical distance, maintain static groups.

Q: What additional support and guidance are available for school systems?

A: LDOE has partnered with Children's Hospital of New Orleans for a Town Hall series every other week through August. The recordings of the webinars are found on the [CHNOLA Town Hall webinar series](#) website.

Updated: November 4, 2021

Q: Are LEAs required to implement a mask mandate in exchange for receiving ESSER III Funds?

A: No. ESSER III does not require schools to implement mask mandates. They must only address the extent to which they are adopting policies on the CDC's safety recommendations.

Maximum Group Size

Q: What is the maximum group size allowable for the 2021-2022 school year?

A: The maximum group size that may convene indoors in a single room should be determined by physical distancing requirements. Younger students who are unable to wear face coverings or maintain a physical distance from other students or adults should be assigned static groups. This should include, at a minimum, students in grade 2 or lower. The static group composition should be maintained for as long as possible. The composition of a group may change if students are able to maintain a physical distance of at least three feet from other students and six feet from adults in a classroom or indoor setting, to the greatest extent possible. Adults should maintain six feet of distance from other adults.

Q: What allowances are made for essential visitors?

A: Essential visitors are individuals who must enter schools or early learning centers in order to conduct visits in accordance with Louisiana law or policy. Essential visitors include, but are not limited to, individuals who:

- conduct CLASS® observations
- observe teacher candidates as part of the teacher preparation quality rating system
- provide essential supports and services including, but not limited to, early intervention services, special education services, or mental health consultation
- Medical or disability impact exceptions to any standard in this Chapter should be addressed on an individual basis by the LEA in accordance with local policies.

Physical Standards

Q: What physical standards are required for schools to reopen?

A: School systems should plan for adequate social distance measures through adaptation of physical standards. [Ready to Achieve! Operational Guidelines](#) provides a series of best practices for maintaining social distance measures.

Q: Are schools allowed to host large group assemblies or gatherings?

A: The best practice recommendation is that assemblies are limited to maximum group sizes and with appropriate physical distancing in place. For younger students unable to maintain physical distance, maintain static groups. All unvaccinated attendees should wear a face covering.

Q: How should students be spaced within the classroom to achieve physical distancing?

A: Student desks should be spaced 6 feet apart to the maximum extent possible. School systems should remove all extra furniture and desks.

Q: Can students be seated at tables?

A: Yes, students may be seated at tables. Schools should consult the [Ready to Achieve! Operational Guidelines](#) for best practices.

Q: Should the close contact definition of “15 minutes of exposure within 6 feet” be in one setting or should it be viewed in a cumulative manner?

A: On Wednesday, October 21, 2020, the CDC [updated their guidance](#) to state: “Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period* starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.”

Q: What updates have been made regarding close contacts due to the updated CDC guidance for physical distancing in schools?

A: The definition of a [close contact](#) is someone who was within 6 feet of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24 hour period. Close contact of a case is a person who was within six feet from the student for more than 15 minutes, determined by the OPH contact tracing process.

- ***All individuals meeting the close contact definition should be encouraged to seek testing immediately following notification and 5 to 7 days following last contact if the initial test was negative.*** If both the case and the contact were engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting face mask AND were within 3 to 6 feet of each other, then those close contacts do not need to quarantine. ***This exception only applies to students and should not be used for teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.***
- On September 29, 2021, LDOE added a “parent choice option” for quarantine. ***A system may elect to implement the parent choice option for quarantine determination. Under this option, mandatory quarantines for students defined as “close contact” are no longer required. In lieu of mandatory quarantine, the parent shall be notified of the exposure and given the option to quarantine their child or allow their child to remain in school. The parent shall also be given the opportunity for a no-cost Covid screening for their child. Should the student test positive or develop symptoms of the virus, the student should isolate until they have recovered and are determined to no longer be infectious.***

Q: What updated guidance has been released regarding physical distancing in schools?

A: Based upon the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) updated [K-12 school guidance](#), which reflects the [latest science](#) on physical distance between students in classrooms, Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) now recommends that, **with universal masking**, students should maintain a distance of *at least 3 feet in classroom settings*.

Q: What guidance has been given to physical distancing within schools outside of the classroom setting?

A: In elementary schools, CDC recommends all students remain at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal — regardless of whether community transmission is low, moderate, substantial, or high.

- In middle and high schools, CDC also recommends students should be at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal and in communities where transmission is low, moderate, or substantial.

- Middle school students and high school students should be at least 6 feet apart in communities where transmission is high, if cohorting is not possible.
- CDC continues to recommend at least 6 feet of distance:
 - Between adults in the school building and between adults and students.
 - In common areas, such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
 - When masks can't be worn, such as when eating.
 - During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, sports, or exercise. These activities should be moved outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces whenever possible.
 - In community settings outside of the classroom.

[Athletics/Extracurricular](#)

Q: What guidance has been provided for athletics and extracurricular activities?

A: For a complete list of athletics guidance, please see the [LHSAA released guidance](#). LHSAA has provided [updated guidance for Fall Sports](#). LHSAA has provided updated guidance for [Winter Sports](#).

Q: Should athletic teams follow the modified quarantine option or the 14 day quarantine option?

A: LDH has received many requests for clarification regarding use of the recently released options for shortening the quarantine period in situations where exemptions to Louisiana's mask mandate are allowed. Because there is an increased risk of post-quarantine transmission associated with options to shorten quarantine, *LDH recommends* the following:

- Due to the high rates of transmission that have been observed among K-12 sports teams, exposed individuals should not participate in athletic events where distancing and/or masking is not maintained until the *full 14 day quarantine period has been completed*.

Q: What guidance has been provided for spectator capacity at LHSAA sanctioned events?

A: Outdoor and indoor spectator capacity for LHSAA-sanctioned athletics shall be set in accordance with the Louisiana State Fire Marshal's guidelines developed in conjunction with the Office of the Governor and the Louisiana Department of Health at opensafely.la.gov

Q: What are the Louisiana Department of Health guidelines for indoor band, vocal and music classes?

A: Band and vocal activities may occur indoors or outdoors. Individuals participating in these activities should maintain physical distancing of 6x6 ft. Bell covers should be used for wind instruments while practicing or performing indoors. Masking is recommended for indoor vocal practices and performances.

Symptom Monitoring

Q: Are temperature checks required for students prior to entry into K-12 facilities?

A: No. Students should be screened at home and prior to arrival at K-12 campus.

Q: What steps should a school system or school site take if a positive COVID case is reported by a student or staff?

A: If a school becomes aware of a presumptive positive or positive case of COVID-19, the child should not attend school until determined to be non-infectious by their doctor. Parents may be notified by the Office of Public Health if their child may have been exposed to the case of COVID-19, along with any next steps. If it is determined that a school was the focus of infection for COVID-19, the school superintendent, in consultation with the Office of Public Health, will determine if the school should remain open or close for a period of time. A positive case of COVID-19 does not necessarily warrant classroom or school closure. School systems should consult the [Louisiana Department of Health Covid-19 Isolation and Quarantine Flowchart for Schools](#) for more information.

Q: What quarantine option should students who are identified as close contacts in PreK-2 that do NOT wear facial coverings at school follow?

A: LDH has received many requests for clarification regarding use of the recently released options for shortening the quarantine period in situations where exemptions to Louisiana’s mask mandate are allowed. Because there is an increased risk of post-quarantine transmission associated with options to shorten quarantine, LDH recommends the following:

- The 14 day quarantine period should be used in daycare and other school settings where masking among children is not maintained.

Q: What if a student becomes ill at school and a parent/guardian is unable to pick the student up?

A: Isolate the student and use your normal procedures for students who need to be picked up when they get sick at school. Keep them in a safe and secure place to wait until they get a safe way home. [Ready to Achieve! School Operational Guidelines](#) provides school systems with a sample assurance letter they can use to inform parents and guardians of their illness policy.

Environmental Cleaning and Personal Hygiene

Q: Are students and staff required to wear facial coverings?

A: On October 26, 2021, [Governor John Bel Edwards issued Proclamation 203 JBE 2021](#), which states the following regarding indoor mask mandates on a K-12 campus:

“All students in K-12 schools in Louisiana shall be required to wear face coverings over the nose and mouth. However, an LEA or school district or non-public school may affirmatively opt out of this mandate only if the LEA or school district or non-public school adopts an isolation and quarantine policy for students, faculty, and staff consistent with the [protocols set by the Louisiana Department of Health \(based upon CDC guidance\)](#).”

Q: Can staff and students wear face shields instead of a cloth mask?

A: The CDC does not recommend a face shield, so a face shield should not be a substitute for a mask. For students or staff members who have a medical exception for a cloth facial covering, a face shield with a drape at the bottom of the shield is allowable as a substitute. The cloth drape must be tucked into clothing at all times and remain tucked in throughout the school day.

Q: What considerations should be made when considering appropriate face coverings?

A: Both the professionally made paper and or cloth face coverings are acceptable. Cloth face coverings may help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus to others. Wearing a cloth face covering will help protect people around you, including those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and workers who frequently come into close contact with other people (e.g., in stores and restaurants). Cloth face coverings are most likely to reduce the spread of COVID-19 when they are widely used by people in public settings. Make sure your cloth face covering:

- fits snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- completely covers the nose and mouth
- is secured with ties or ear loops
- includes multiple layers of fabric
- allows for breathing without restriction
- can be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

It is not known if face shields provide any benefit as source control to protect others from the spray of respiratory particles. CDC does not recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings. Some people may choose to use a face shield when sustained close contact with other people is expected. If face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer's face and extend to below the chin. Disposable face shields should only be worn for a single use. Reusable face shields should be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

Q: Should school systems close shared water fountains in K-12 facilities?

A: School systems should close shared water fountains, but may keep bottle filling stations open. School systems should consult p.10 of the [School Reopening Guidance](#) for further information.

Q: Should schools conduct frequent deep cleaning of facilities?

A: Schools should conduct frequent day to day cleaning with a focus on high touch surfaces. School systems should consult the [School Reopening Guidance](#) for further information, including a list of high touch surfaces and appropriate cleaners.

Q: Do schools need to provide warm water for hand washing?

A: No, the use of soap and scrubbing of the hands works to kill the virus. If handwashing stations aren't readily available, schools may use hand sanitizer instead. Hand sanitizers must be at least 60% alcohol content. Temporary portable hand sinks may be installed due to Covid-19 reopening policies and until operations can return to normal when it is safe to do so.

Q: How often should bathrooms and other frequently used shared areas be cleaned?

A: Bathrooms and other frequently used shared areas should be cleaned twice a day, with a focus on high touch spaces-door handles, sink handles, soap dispensers and other areas that are touched frequently.

Updated: November 4, 2021

Q: What is the cleaning protocol for using Clorox/disinfecting wipes/cleaning solutions?

A: Students should not be disinfecting personal areas in schools with disinfectant wipes or cleaning solutions. The cleaning of these areas should be conducted by appropriate school system personnel and in accordance with the most recent [CDC guidelines](#).

Q: What guidance is provided for the quarantine procedures for close contacts?

A: School systems should refer to the [LDH Interim Guidance for Shortened Quarantine](#).

- School systems should continue to work with their Regional Medical Director to establish best practices for their school system.
- A system may elect to implement the parent choice option for quarantine determination. Under this option, mandatory quarantines for students defined as “close contact” are no longer required. In lieu of mandatory quarantine, the parent shall be notified of the exposure and given the option to quarantine their child or allow their child to remain in school. The parent shall also be given the opportunity for a no-cost Covid screening for their child. Should the student test positive or develop symptoms of the virus, the student should isolate until they have recovered and are determined to no longer be infectious.

Q: If a student is an identified close contact of a Covid positive household member, are they still able to choose the parent choice quarantine option?

A: The parent choice option is only available for close contacts identified within the K-12 educational setting. All other close contact determinations from community spread or household contact should follow the already established quarantine procedures.

Transportation

Q: What is the maximum number of students allowed on transportation buses?

A: LDOE has also communicated the Federal requirements of the January 29, 2021, CDC [Order](#) that requires face masks to be worn by all people while on public transportation, which includes all passengers and all personnel operating conveyances, (regardless of capacity) traveling into, within, or out of the United States and U.S. territories. This [Order](#) includes school buses.

Q: Are buses required to have hand sanitizer available?

A: As a best practice recommendation, all passengers should engage in hand hygiene upon entering the bus. Hand sanitizer should not exceed 80 percent alcohol concentration and containers should be securely closed, secured against shifting and protected from damage

Q: Are students required to wear facial coverings on a bus?

A: According to the Presidential Executive Order No. 13998 on Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel, all passengers on school buses must wear a facial covering while using transportation, regardless of capacity. .

Q: Is it necessary to keep the windows down on a bus if it is air conditioned?

A: Yes, windows should be down on transportation to maintain maximum air flow. School systems should consult the [School Reopening Guidance](#) for further information regarding mitigation efforts on transportation.

Q: What processes should schools use for bus dismissal?

A: Students should stand in a single file line, 6ft apart, with masks on, and can complete a quiet activity. The windows on the bus should be cracked to allow for air flow.

[Additional Operational Considerations](#)

Q: How should schools proceed with restroom breaks?

A: Schools can break static groups to use the restroom. Ensure students are six feet apart in line. Suggestions to aid in this include marking hallways with tape to demonstrate where students should stand in line to maintain the 6 feet of distance required.

Q: What waivers have been issued for nutrition programs at this time?

A: USDA has issued five waivers to provide the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program various flexibilities. The waivers are effective through June 30, 2021.

[Nationwide Meal Times Waiver](#)

[Nationwide Non-Congregate Feeding Waiver](#)

[Nationwide Meal Pattern Waiver](#)

[Nationwide Parent/Guardian Meal Pick-Up Waiver](#)

[Nationwide Waiver to Allow Offer Versus Serve Flexibility in Senior High Schools](#)

Q: How can school systems safely carry out fire drills and other safety drills?

A: The Office of the Fire Marshall has issued a [memo surrounding Emergency Drills](#). Occupants shall not be required to relocate during drills to safe areas or to the exterior of the building where social distancing of six feet between individuals cannot be maintained. Simulated “stay in place” drills may be conducted in lieu of actual relocation. School systems should work with their local law enforcement agencies when developing active shooter emergency drills to ensure appropriate social distancing measures take place.

Q: Do I need to obtain an additional background check to provide related services for students K-12 that will be attending virtual learning in a child care center?

A: Yes. All K-12 essential visitors and contractors, including mental health consultants and special education service providers, must have a child care criminal background check (CCCBC) in order to provide services at an early learning center and a registered in-home or family home provider. The background checks approved by the school systems for

Updated: November 4, 2021

K-12 purposes is not acceptable for child care security purposes. Please contact LDElicensing@la.gov with additional questions.

Q: What guidance is provided for taking class or large group photographs (i.e. band, spirit groups, athletic groups)?

A: It is recommended that group pictures be taken while practicing physical distancing of 6 feet or more and while wearing facial coverings. Outside pictures are preferred and students or faculty that are ill or experiencing COVID like symptoms should not participate.

[Teaching and Learning: School Reopening Best Practices](#)

Q: What trauma informed and/or mental health training will be provided to teachers and school administrators to support students as a result of the pandemic? How will the school system support the students' emotional well-being?

A: LDOE released the [Guide to Supporting the Well-Being of Students and Staff](#). The guide includes free or low-cost mental health screeners that can be used to identify students in need of mental health supports.

Q: What guidance has been provided for privacy requirements in a virtual setting?

A: The Department has released a [sample consent letter](#) for school systems to send to parents when students are engaging in virtual learning. Additional guidance is provided in the [Privacy and Security for Distance Learning toolkit](#)

Q: What are the required student teacher ratios for virtual settings?

A: This is dependent upon the teacher's responsibilities in the virtual setting. If the teacher's responsibilities in the virtual setting are exactly the same as in a brick and mortar setting (e.g. lesson preparation, lesson delivery, individual support for students, formative and summative assessments, grading of summative and formative assessments, parent communications, etc.) then the student teacher ratios outlined in policy must be followed. If the virtual responsibilities differ from that of a brick and mortar setting, then the ratios need to be determined at the local level.

For example, if a teacher is recording a lesson, that lesson could be shared with hundreds of students. Similarly, a teacher could deliver a short lesson to hundreds of students and then other teachers could be assigned to provide individual support and feedback to students. For more information regarding staffing, please refer to the [Strong Start Staffing FAQ](#) document.

Q: What guidance has been offered for safely conducting physical education in a face to face setting?

A: The department has released a set of [re-entry guidelines for physical education classes](#) within a face to face setting. Schools should make sure that all classes are maintaining appropriate physical distancing and adhering to maximum group sizes and facial covering requirements.

Q: What guidance has been provided for conducting gifted and talented screening?

A: There are no waivers for mandatory literacy screener administration or reporting for second and third graders per Act 688. [The Guidance for Various Learning Environments](#) specifically addresses completing the screening virtually, and students scoring above grade level shall still be considered for evaluation into a gifted program. Every effort should be

made to continue to evaluate students for Gifted and Talented services in person, meeting Phase II guidelines, or virtually. Services for students identified as Gifted and/or Talented must continue within the [guidelines](#) set forth in Phase II of reopening.

Q: Do students have to wear facial coverings while outside at recess?

A: Fully vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals do not need to mask outdoors if they adhere to physical distancing requirements. Students should maintain a physical distancing of 6 ft while outdoors. A maximum of 4 (four) cohorts can mix outdoors

Q: Can schools hold large assemblies?

A: Assemblies are limited to maximum group sizes and with appropriate physical distancing in place. For younger students unable to maintain physical distance, maintain static groups.

Q: What information is available regarding LHSAA sanctioned athletic events?

A: Refer to additional guidance provided by the [Louisiana High School Athletic Association \(LHSAA\) for High School Fall Sports Events](#). Additionally, school systems should continue to monitor the LHSAA website for additional updates: <https://www.lhsaa.org/>

Q: What is the guidance surrounding spacing in shared common areas (i.e. cafeterias) if all students return to in-person instruction on a campus? Is the expectation still 6 feet apart or can they sit closer?

A: Limit use of indoor shared spaces, such as cafeterias and gymnasiums, to maximum group sizes to ensure physical distance and clean between each group's use. If students are eating in a cafeteria they should be spaced 6 feet apart while eating.

Q: Should school nurses be conducting lice checks given that it requires close contact of less than 6 feet?

A: School nurses should continue all essential wellness checks while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (face shield, mask, gloves, gown) when conducting any assessment according to the PPE recommendations outlined by the CDC.

Q: Can students check out library books?

A: Yes, students may check out library materials

[Vaccination Information](#)

Q: Who is eligible to receive a vaccine at a pharmacy or other provider?

A: Everyone over the age of 16 is eligible for vaccinations. For more information, please check the [211 FAQ](#) provided by the Louisiana Department of Health.

[Transportation Updates](#)

Q: What are the transportation requirements after June 1, 2021?

A: School buses may operate at **100% capacity if all passengers are masked**. Windows should be kept open when it does not create a safety or health hazard. Seating charts should be created and consistently enforced.

Q: Do all occupants have to wear facial coverings on transportation?

A: According to the [Presidential Executive Order No. 13998](#) on Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel, issued on January 21, 2021,

Sec. 2. Immediate Action to Require Mask-Wearing on Certain Domestic Modes of Transportation.

(a) Mask Requirement. The Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Secretary of Transportation (including through the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)), the Secretary of Homeland Security (including through the Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the Commandant of the United States Coast Guard), and the heads of any other executive departments and agencies (agencies) that have relevant regulatory authority (heads of agencies) shall immediately take action, to the extent appropriate and consistent with applicable law, **to require masks to be worn in compliance with CDC guidelines in or on:**

- (i) airports;
- (ii) commercial aircraft;
- (iii) trains;
- (iv) public maritime vessels, including ferries;
- (v) intercity bus services; and
- (vi) **all forms of public transportation** as defined in section 5302 of title 49, United States Code.

Additionally, Governor John Bel Edwards issued [Proclamation Number 93 JBE 2021](#), which states in Section 3 that: In accordance with the order issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on January 29, 2021, all individuals shall wear a face covering over the nose and mouth while passengers and operators of public conveyances, including airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, buses, taxis, ride-shares, and the corresponding transportation hubs.

More resources can be found at the [National Association for Pupil Transportation](#).

