

School Reopening Frequently Asked Questions

These questions and answers are meant to supplement information provided in [The Road Back](#), the Department's reopening guidance for schools, which outlines anticipated minimum standards to which districts must comply in developing reopening plans. A [checklist](#) that the Department will use in reviewing plans may also be useful to districts in determining the necessary components of reopening plans.

Face Coverings

1. Are face coverings required for staff, students, and visitors in school facilities?

Yes. District staff, students, and visitors are required to wear face coverings except under the following circumstances:

- a. When doing so would inhibit the individual's health.
 - b. When a student is in extreme heat outdoors.
 - c. When a student is in water.
 - d. If a student's documented medical condition, or disability as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), precludes the use of a face covering.
 - e. If a student is under the age of two (2), due to the risk of suffocation.
 - f. When a student is eating or drinking.
 - g. If or when anyone has trouble breathing or is unconscious, is incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance (e.g., face coverings should not be worn by Pre-K students during nap time).
 - h. The student is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities.
 - i. During gym and music classes when individuals are in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet apart (see number 2 below).
 - j. When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task (for example, students operating machinery in which face coverings may get caught).
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- ### 2. Are students required to wear face coverings during specials/electives such as music/choir or physical education?

Face coverings may be removed during physical education or music classes, provided individuals are in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet apart. Vigorous exercise, as well as music and choir classes in a confined space (e.g., indoors) may [contribute to transmission of COVID-19](#) and should be limited. Consider conducting such activities in an area with greater ventilation or air exchange (e.g., outdoors). When students are not singing or playing an instrument that requires the use of their mouth, they should wear a face covering in music class (unless class is outdoors and distance can be maintained).

- 3. Who is responsible for supplying face coverings and other supplies to staff and students? Who should be notified if the district cannot acquire the necessary health and safety supplies needed for reopening? Is an enhanced level of PPE needed for school nurses and/or other staff who work more closely with students?**

Face coverings may be provided by the student's family/guardian and can be included as part of the back to school supplies list provided to families/guardians prior to the start of school year. Schools should provide extra disposable face coverings for students who need them (e.g. students who forget or misplace their face coverings) and should provide face coverings for students that are experiencing financial hardship and are unable to afford them to the greatest extent possible.

Districts should provide (in addition to normal supplies) any additional supplies/materials necessary for staff to do their jobs. For example, teaching staff, nursing staff, food service professionals, etc., should be provided with gloves, as necessary.

The Road Back (p. 25-27) advises that special consideration should be given to protect staff members, such as school nurses, custodians, and some special education teachers, paraprofessionals and services providers, who will be in close contact with students or handle waste materials. As a resource, the Department's guidance also refers to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's [memo](#) regarding Guidance on Required Safety Supplies for Re-opening Schools, which provides additional information on the quantity and type of PPE materials for such staff members.

- 4. How long should a face mask be used before it is replaced?**

Based on updated reopening standards from the Department of Education, all students and staff are required to wear face coverings. Cloth face coverings are different than surgical face masks (which could also be worn but which are in short supply and should generally be reserved for healthcare workers). Cloth face coverings should be washed at the end of every day (sooner if they become wet or soiled). Single use disposable face masks should be changed daily unless they become damp or soiled, in this case they should be replaced immediately.

- 5. Can staff and/or students wear face shields instead of face coverings?**

Currently, the CDC does not recommend use of face shields as a substitute for face coverings. Therefore, they may not be used to satisfy face covering requirements. However, they may be an option for students with medical or other challenges that preclude the use of face coverings. 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.

Screening and Testing

- 1. What measures need to be in place to identify people that have COVID-19 but do not know it because they are asymptomatic?**

Asymptomatic individuals do not have symptoms that can be identified without a test. Contact tracing is designed to identify those individuals without symptoms who may have been in contact with a person with COVID-19 and who should quarantine. Per CDS guidance, if individuals have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, they should self-quarantine for 14 days from last possible exposure prior to returning.

2. Should school districts require daily testing of all students and staff?

No. There is no statewide policy for testing students and currently neither the CDC nor the NJ DOH recommend daily testing of students.

3. Should students, staff, or others who have been tested for COVID-19 attend or visit school while they await test results?

Anyone who is sick should stay home from school. Anyone who suspects they are ill and received a COVID-19 test should not attend or visit school while awaiting test results. Should the test result be negative, they should follow normal illness exclusion rules (typically 24 hours without fever before they can return to school). If a clinician has a suspicion that the illness may be COVID-19 despite a negative test, they should follow general guidance related to COVID-19 – ie, unless they were immunocompromised, they would wait at least 10 days from symptom onset and at least one day from resolution of symptoms prior to returning. If the individual should be quarantined based upon a known exposure, then they would need to wait 14 days from last possible exposure prior to returning.

4. What are the rules and procedures to clear an individual to return to school following a positive test result? Does a test need to come back negative?

A negative test is not necessary to return to school. CDS follows CDC guidelines, which provide that persons with COVID-19 who have symptoms and were directed to care for themselves at home may discontinue isolation under the following conditions:

- At least 10 days* have passed since symptom onset, and
- At least 24 hours have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, and
- Other symptoms have improved.

See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>.

*A limited number of persons with severe illness may produce replication-competent virus beyond 10 days, that may warrant extending duration of isolation for up to 20 days after symptom onset. Consider consultation with infection control experts. See Discontinuation of Transmission-Based Precautions and Disposition of Patients with COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings (Interim Guidance).

Persons infected with SARS-CoV-2 who never develop COVID-19 symptoms may discontinue isolation and other precautions 10 days after the date of their first positive RT-PCR test for SARS-CoV-2 RNA.

5. Should there be a specific place at school to isolate students or staff who show symptoms of COVID-19?

Schools must identify a designated space where persons with COVID-19 symptoms can be separated from other students and staff while they wait to be picked up from school. School nurses and other healthcare providers should use Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions when caring for sick people.

6. If a student who has been at school is identified as having COVID, does the entire class have to be quarantined for 14 days?

As provided in CDS guidance, if individuals have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, meaning they are within 6 feet of someone for at least ten minutes, they should self-quarantine for 14 days from the date of last exposure before returning to school. In the case of a positive COVID test, local health departments, working in coordination with school districts, will conduct contact tracing to determine whether or not an individual has been in close contact with a student and advise any affected individuals, via trained contact tracers, to self-quarantine for 14 days. The local health department in coordination with the school will assess the specific circumstances of the individual with the positive test to determine those individuals that have been in close contact and need to self-quarantine – this may or may not include all students in the class.

7. If a student is removed from or denied access to the school building based on the screening required under Critical Area of Operation #5 in [The Road Back](#), how should attendance for that student be marked?

In such an instance, districts should mark the student's attendance in accordance with local attendance policy, which will depend in part on whether the student is able to participate in remote instruction on that day. District and school policies for attendance and instructional time may require modification for the 2020-2021 school year and will need to accommodate opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous instruction, while ensuring the requirements for the 180-day school year are met. The policy will need to specify attendance procedures for students that will be participating in any combination of remote, hybrid, or in person instruction, including details on the recording of absences due to illness or attendance when a student is participating in fully remote learning.

Social Distancing

1. Are districts responsible for maintaining social distancing in all buses, classrooms, bathrooms and school spaces at all times?

Face coverings should be worn by all staff, students, and visitors in accordance with the [updated guidance](#).

In addition to wearing face coverings, schools and districts must implement policies that allow for social distancing within the classroom to the maximum extent practicable. This can be achieved by ensuring students are seated at least six feet apart. If schools are not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications should be considered. These include using physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction (rather than facing each other) or having students sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart.

Policies must be designed so that all instructional and non-instructional rooms (e.g. bathrooms, common areas, and auditoriums) in school and district facilities comply with social distancing standards to the maximum extent practicable. Any modifications to school district facilities should be in coordination with local code officials and Department county offices to ensure that alterations adhere to school safety requirements.

School districts should enact policies to maintain social distancing practices on buses (at least six feet of distance between riders) to the maximum extent practicable. Several methods are available to achieve such social distancing:

- a. The CDC recommends that school districts modify the manner students are seated on a school bus such that there is one student seated per row, skipping a row between each child, if possible. Under this scenario, a 54-passenger bus would only have 11 passengers (seating students who reside in the same household in the same row, whenever possible, would increase capacity).
 - b. Alternatively, a district may consider seating one student per row, doubling the vehicle's capacity.
 - i. For example, several companies have started marketing physical barriers that separate rows on a school bus. Such equipment would allow students to be seated in each row, thereby doubling the socially distant capacity that was previously noted. Entities that oversee the safety of school buses, the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission and federal regulators, would need to approve the use of such equipment.
2. **What is the current research on the relationship between the length of time an individual spends in close proximity to another and the level of risk of contracting COVID-19? For example, what is the increased degree of risk for students in a school building for 6 hours vs 4 hours vs the hour an individual may be in a hair salon?**

There are many factors that determine the likelihood of an individual becoming infected. Such factors include the infectivity of infected individuals, whether face coverings are worn, and conditions in the physical environment (indoor vs outdoor, air circulation,

etc.). As such, it is impossible to directly quantify risk over time. However, it is clear that prolonged exposure without proper social distancing or face coverings increases risk.

- 3. What does research tell us about the specific ventilation standards that should be in place to provide safe learning environments? How often should these systems be inspected for compliance with these standards?**

Per the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) standards, all schools are covered by the [Indoor Air Quality standard](#) (N.J.A.C. 12:100-13).

The standard provides requirements for HVAC inspection, maintenance and maintaining acceptable IAQ indicators, i.e., temperature, carbon dioxide levels, etc. There is extensive information on the [PEOSH](#) website, including guidance, checklists and a model of a written Indoor Air Quality program.

- 4. Will there be an expectation that a second adult will be on each school bus in order to enforce social distancing and wearing masks so that the driver can focus on the road and the students will comply?**

There is no NJDOE COVID-19 anticipated minimum standard that school buses require additional staff. Staffing decisions remain in the purview of the board of education. The NJDOE encourages school district Restart Committees to consider methods for implementing the minimum anticipated standards described in the Road Back in a manner that reflects local needs and circumstances.

- 5. What notifications are required to the school community when there is an exposure? Timing? Method of communication? What notifications are required to the school community when there is a positive test result of a teacher / student / staff member?**

As outlined in The Road Back, if the school district becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in a district facility tests positive for COVID-19, district officials must immediately notify local health officials, staff, and families of a confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality. Notification procedures must be consistent with the district's contact tracing policy to the maximum extent practicable.

Districts should work with their local health department and follow CDC guidelines for illness reporting. They should also work with their local health department to develop written protocols to address a positive case.

- 6. Are school facilities open to the communities for recreational use?**

Yes, in accordance with the NJDOE's "The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education." As noted in Critical Area of Operation #10, all extracurricular activities that are otherwise permitted must comply with applicable social distancing requirements and hygiene protocol. External community organizations that use school facilities must follow district guidance on health and safety protocols.

- 7. How should districts accommodate class activities with shared objects, such as art supplies or musical instruments?**

As stated on page 10 of "The Road Back: Restart and Recovery for Education," school districts should avoid or limit sharing objects and equipment. When sharing is unavoidable, objects and equipment should be disinfected between uses.

- 8. If there is an apparent conflict between recommendations set forth in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) standards and CDC guidelines, which set of standards should districts abide by?**

Districts should comply with those provisions identified as anticipated minimum standards in the Department's reopening guidance, which was developed in consultation with the NJ Department of Health. All other resources referenced throughout the guidance, such as the AAP standards and CDC guidelines, are designed to support local decision-making and consultation with local health officials.

- 9. If a parent opts-out of sending their child to school, can they still participate in sports or other extra-curricular activities?**

Yes. Students may still participate in sports and extra-curricular activities if they are utilizing the full-time remote learning option, if such sports and extra-curricular activities are otherwise permitted.

Contact Tracing Responsibilities and Procedures

- 1. Which entity should serve as a health and safety contact if school districts have questions about reopening?**

The primary contact for school districts should be the local health departments, which will use state level guidance to work with local officials upon school reopening. The Department of Education and Department of Health work closely together on all school reopening guidance, and DOE field representatives should continue to serve as district and school points of contact should questions arise throughout the school year.

Plan Development and Submission

- 1. Is local board of education approval required for the district's reopening plan?**

Although the NJDOE does not require approval of district reopening plans by district boards of education, school districts and charter schools are expected to include members of their board of education or board of trustees on their Restart Committee. Local boards of education should contact their board attorney regarding approval of school calendars, school hours, and safety protocols and policies.

2. **Can districts share reopening plans with teachers, parents, and the school community prior to review from the NJDOE?**

NJDOE review of plans is not required prior to sharing information with staff, parents, and the school community. Districts should ensure that staff, parents, and the school community understand the plans are pending review and may be subject to change. Districts should communicate regularly with the school community during the plan development process and post reopening plans on their district's website.

Scheduling

1. **Will school days be required to meet any length of day requirements in the 2020-2021 school year?**

As noted on page 49 of “The Road Back: Restart and Recovery for Education,” according to N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3, a school day shall consist of not less than four hours, except that one continuous session of two and one-half hours may be considered a full day in kindergarten. District and school policies for attendance and instructional contact time will need to accommodate opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous instruction, while ensuring the requirements for a 180-day school year are met.

2. **Are districts allowed to utilize varying hybrid approaches that best fit their school community's needs, i.e. four, four-hour days and one day of remote instruction?**

Yes. School districts may utilize a variety of schedules that ensure compliance with N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3. District and school policies for attendance and instructional contact time will need to accommodate opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous instruction, while ensuring the requirements for a 180-day school year are met.

Special Education

1. **Can parents choose to have instruction at home, but only send their child to school for therapy (OT/PT/SLP)?**

Under the NJDOE's [fulltime remote learning guidance](#), a family/guardian may submit a request for fulltime remote learning which may include any service or combination of services that would otherwise be delivered on an in-person or hybrid schedule, such as instruction, behavioral and support services, special education, and related services. A family/guardian may request that some services be delivered entirely remotely, while other services follow the same schedule they otherwise would according to the district's reopening plan.