

COVID-19 Guidance for the 2021-2022 School Year



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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the 2020-21 School Year, NOLA Public Schools issued a Roadmap to Reopening Schools, establishing clear operational expectations to guide the reopening of schools in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adherence to these guidelines, in combination with utilization of resources such as testing, resulted in our district providing safe, in-person instruction for nearly the entire school year.

As we approach the 2021-22 School Year, COVID-19 rates in our community have decreased significantly and access to vaccines for the virus are widely available for community members age 12 and up. The enclosed guidelines provide updated, health and safety standards for schools to adhere to as we continue to serve students and staff in the upcoming school year.

Our health and safety standards for 2021-22 are aligned with guidelines provided by state and federal leaders and the medical experts who have supported us for the past year. These guidelines are developed based on the current context of the pandemic and are likely to change over the course of the year as we observe the course of the pandemic locally and continue to learn from the science of vaccinations, viral transmission, and effective public health practices.

We applaud our educators for building adaptive plans for teaching and learning as they respond to our community's updated safety procedures and protocols. It is also important to acknowledge that there will continue to be cases of COVID-19 in our community, and schools, and we will have the protocols necessary to help our educators determine the appropriate next steps to keep our school community safe. We can continue to get through this together.

For information regarding COVID 19, please visit the [Louisiana Department of Health website](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](#) and follow the standards outlined in this document.

ESSENTIAL ENTITIES IN GUIDELINE CREATION

Louisiana State Department of Health:

- Sets the public health requirements for public entities
- Provides the Louisiana Department of Education with guidance on school opening

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE):

- Provides [guidelines](#) to school districts, aligned to federal and state public health standards, for how to open schools
- Provides best practices and resources for implementing guidelines

City of New Orleans and the New Orleans Health Department:

- Sets [guidelines](#) for citywide reopening
- Communicates status of reopening that directly impact school planning and operations
- Manages community testing and citywide public health surveillance

NOLA Public Schools (NOLA-PS):

- Sets operational health and safety standards for the opening of schools, aligned to health and safety guidelines set by the Louisiana Department of Education and other relevant state and local agencies
- Implements systems to oversee and hold schools accountable to the health and safety standards
- Identifies system-wide needs and seeks solutions to support schools as they continue to serve students and support educators citywide.
- Provides training and resources to schools for successfully implementing the safety standards
- Manages the relationship with the Regional Medical Director and Office of Homeland Security
- Determines if and when schools need to close their facilities, in coordination with school leaders, the New Orleans Health Department, our Medical Advisors, and the Regional Medical Director
- Provides Medical Advisors to schools throughout the school year

Individual Charter Management Organizations:

- Develop school-based operational plans for opening schools in accordance with the NOLA Public Schools Operational Health and Safety Standards
- Implement the day-to-day operational procedures and delivery of instruction to students
- Communicate the status of opening requirements directly to students, families, and staff in the day-to-day implementation of operational and instructional plans
- Communicate with students, families, and staff in the event of illness

OPERATIONAL RESTRICTIONS

The following restrictions and requirements will be in place for the 2021-22 school year based on the [School Opening Guidelines](#) provided by the Louisiana Department of Education.

Maximum Classroom Capacity	No maximum classroom size. The maximum group size that may convene indoors in a single room should be determined by physical distancing requirements and student grouping method.
Maximum School Bus Capacity	100% capacity with all passengers wearing a face covering and sitting in assigned seats or with daily seating charts.
Student Classroom Grouping Options	Students may be grouped in classrooms in one of two ways: (1) In static groups with minimal social distancing requirements OR (2) In groups with changing composition, maintaining 3 feet of social distance from other students and 6 feet of social distance from adults.
Reporting Requirements	All NOLA-PS schools are required to report all known and suspected cases of COVID-19 to NOLA PS and the LDH School Portal (see page 7). A process for providing information on the vaccination rate of students and staff will be established by the beginning of the school year.

OPERATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS FOR SCHOOLS

In consultation with the City of New Orleans Department of Health and the [guidance](#) provided by the Louisiana Department of Education, NOLA Public Schools designed the following operational standards for critical school functions.

The Operational Health and Safety Standards set forth school-site expectations to mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19 for in-person school programs. These standards are subject to change as conditions change.



Conducting Group Gatherings: According to the CDC, a [gathering](#) refers to a planned or spontaneous event, indoors or outdoors, with a small number of people participating or a large number of people in attendance such as a community event or gathering or sporting event.

Maximum Classroom Capacity	There is no maximum number of students designated to each classroom. Group size shall be determined by space available for social distancing requirements and the student grouping used (see page 3).
Indoor Assembly Spaces	Use of indoor shared spaces, such as cafeterias and gymnasiums, should be determined by social distancing requirements. For events, spectator capacity limits are provided by the City of New Orleans. Refer here for current updates. For spectator events all attendees should wear a face covering.
Outdoor Standards	Standards are determined by student grouping methods (static OR changing composition). If groups convene outdoors, each group should remain separated.



Transporting Students: These standards are derived from school operating procedures and the best “reasonable standard” given feasibility constraints.

Max. Bus Capacity	100% capacity with all passengers wearing face masks.
Cleaning	High touch surfaces (handrails, handles, seat backs, etc.) should be cleaned after the completion of arrival and dismissal routes.
Seating	Seating charts should be created and enforced in the event close contacts to a positive case of COVID-19 needs to be determined.
Face Coverings	Adults and students are required to wear face coverings at all times while riding on school buses.
Personal Hygiene	Provide face masks for students that enter the bus without a mask.
Ventilation	To increase airflow, windows should be open to the maximum extent possible.



Entering and Exiting School Buildings: Schools will implement the following standards to keep students and staff safe while entering and exiting school buildings.

Entry and Exit Points	Maintain social distance recommendations to the maximum extent possible at all entry and exit points.
Drop-off and Pick-up Processes	Schools should encourage families and employees to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 prior to arrival on campus. Temperature checks of visitors, students, and faculty on campus are no longer required .
Visitors	Limit nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as much as possible. See page 5 of the LDOE’s Ready to Achieve guidance for a definition of essential visitors.



Practicing Prevention: In accordance with the CDC’s strategies to encourage behaviors that reduce the spread of COVID-19, and with input from medical professionals, schools will implement the following standards.

Daily Cleaning Efforts	High touch surfaces should undergo cleaning with a commercially available cleaning solution, including EPA-approved disinfectants or a dilute bleach solution, at least twice per day, including bathrooms. See page 5 of the LDOE’s Reach to Achieve guidance for a list of high touch surfaces.
Personal Hygiene	Students should wash or sanitize hands upon arrival at school, before and after eating, before and after using outdoor play equipment, and before exiting the school facility.
Personal Protective Supplies	School employees should be provided adequate access to hygienic supplies, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, disinfectant wipes or spray, paper towels, and tissues. Face coverings should also be provided when needed.
Signs and Messaging	Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., school entrances, restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures and describe how to stop the spread of germs (such as by properly washing hands and properly wearing a cloth face covering).
Face Coverings	Schools may allow students and staff members who are fully vaccinated to remove masks while in the school facility. All unvaccinated individuals are required to wear masks while in the school facility. No one is required to wear a mask while outdoors. Schools will verify the vaccination status of all those requesting the ability to remove masks. Please refer to the “Vaccination Status of Students and Staff” section for various methods schools may use to verify vaccination status. Individuals are fully vaccinated once they are more than 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or more than 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine.
Symptom Monitoring	No temperature checks or symptom monitoring is required upon arrival. Schools need to communicate to parents the importance of keeping children home when they are sick and the symptoms they should check for daily. Please refer to the section “When a Child, Staff Member, or Visitor Becomes Sick” for how to respond to someone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
Water Fountains	Encourage staff and students to bring their own water to minimize use and touching of water fountains or consider closing shared water fountains.



Student Transitions and Pull Out: To limit contact as students move around the school facility and to support schools in maintaining static groups, schools will implement the following standards.

Provider Pull Out	Students with disabilities should receive special education and related services in the least restrictive environment. Schools should consider any additional service providers who need to enter the classroom, students who receive services outside the classroom (e.g. resource, APE), and/or students who receive services through alternate instructional methods. After services are provided all shared surfaces and equipment should be cleaned before the next student is served
Controlling Flow	Limit the interactions of students during class transitions via one-way flow hallways, clearly defined space for two-way direction of student flow in hallways or staggered class changes to decrease the number of students in the hallway at one time.



Child Nutrition: Our schools will maintain a healthy environment and provide healthy school meals to our students.

Available Meal Programs	Meals are provided to all students. If students are being accommodated with distance learning (see page 7), a meal service option must be created to provide two meals a day.
Eating at School	<p>If cafeterias are used the following criteria must be followed;</p> <p><u>Students in Static Groups:</u> the static group must be maintained during meals and each static group must be separated by no less than 6 feet from the next static group.</p> <p><u>Students in Changing Groups:</u> must maintain a physical distance of at least three feet from other students and six feet from adults to the greatest extent possible.</p>



Extracurricular Activities: Schools will offer extended school day options and non-academic experiences for students while complying with health and safety guidance, schools will implement the following extracurricular standards.

Aftercare	Must maintain static groups where possible and/or implement social distancing requirements for groups of changing composition and enforce facial covering protocols for the unvaccinated.
Band and Vocal Music	If all students and staff participating in band or vocal music are either vaccinated or participating in a weekly molecular testing, these activities can occur indoors. If not, it is recommended that these activities occur outdoors.
Field Trips	Field trips can occur if strictly following masking, cohorting, and transportation requirements. Outdoor field trip opportunities should be prioritized, if possible.
Athletics	<p>Athletic activities are to comply with the recommendations put forth in the Louisiana High School Athletic Association’s Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities. It is strongly recommended that students participating in athletics are vaccinated or participating in a weekly molecular testing regiment.</p> <p>Spectator capacity limits are set by the City of New Orleans, see guidance here.</p> <p>All attendees of indoor athletic events should wear a face covering.</p>

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. To review a list of the populations at higher risk for severe illness, please visit the [CDC website](#).

For students requiring distance learning due to health conditions, families must gain documentation from a physician and provide it to their schools for review and approval. The educational programming provided will be determined by each school if and when accommodations are approved. Schools may provide families with the following [form](#) to request special accommodations.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Known and Suspected Cases of COVID-19

Once schools are notified of a confirmed case or identify a suspected case in their school community (student or staff member) either through public health contact tracing, family notification or school provided routine testing, the school is to report this incident in the following ways. Please note, schools are asked to report single cases and multiple cases differently.

- **Single Confirmed or Suspected Case:**
 - School nurses should call the Children’s Hospital New Orleans Hotline for School Wellness and Virtual Care COVID-19 hotline (504.837.7760) to determine any additional steps related to communication, quarantining practices, internal-to-school contact tracing, or enhanced cleaning or disinfection processes.
 - School staff should communicate the case to NOLA Public Schools via our online form found [here](#) immediately. Information should **not** include name, date of birth or other identifiable data.
 - School staff should submit information regarding the case to LDH via School Online COVID-19 portal. If there are issues logging into your online portal you may contact the Region 1 Office of the Louisiana Department of Health and make the report to Dr. Shantal Herbert-Magee at 504-599-0100 or Shantel.Hebert-Magee@la.gov.
 - Additional resources and tools:
 - Schools may view a checklist of all needed actions once a confirmed or suspect case is identified [here](#).
 - Please see additional guidance [here](#) for considerations for students with disabilities excluded during quarantine.
- **Multiple Confirmed Cases:** If multiple cases of COVID-19 are reported at a single site, schools must contact the Region 1 Office of the Louisiana Department of Health and the NOLA Public Schools Medical Advisors to review and determine when/if additional actions are required.
 - Louisiana Department of Health Region 1 contact information: Dr. Shantal Herbert-Magee at 504-599-0100 or Shantel.Hebert-Magee@la.gov.
 - NOLA Public Schools Medical Advisors Contact Information: Medical_Advisors@nolapublicschools.com

Vaccination Status of Students and Staff

Schools must track the vaccination status of students and staff. Schools may verify vaccination status in one of the following ways.

- Louisiana Immunization Network School Nurse Portal: This portal will allow school nurses to verify the COVID-19 vaccination status for students as of August 2021. This is the preferred method to verify student immunization status for COVID-19.

- LA Wallet: Staff with LA Wallet will be able to demonstrate their COVID-19 vaccination status via their electronic ID.
- Health Care Provider Vaccination Card: Schools may use vaccination cards provided by the individual's vaccinator as evidence of COVID-19 vaccination. For students providing Health Care Provider Vaccination cards their status should be verified via the Louisiana Immunization Network School Nurse Portal.

It is critical for schools to know the vaccination status of all staff and students to aid in contact tracing protocols and to identify those that may discontinue the use of face coverings while in school facilities. Schools will be asked to update NOLA Public Schools with the rate of vaccination among students and staff with a yet to be determined frequency.

COVID-19 TESTING AND VACCINATION RESOURCES

In addition to the operations and safety guidance provided in other sections of this guidance document the availability of testing for symptomatic individuals, routine testing and access to vaccinations are vital components to our ongoing strategy to keep students and staff safe while in school. Below is an overview of the resources available to students and staff for this upcoming school year.

Symptomatic Testing

All students, teachers, and staff experiencing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 are strongly encouraged to seek treatment by medical professionals. Symptomatic students may continue to visit Children’s Hospital for free COVID-19 testing by calling the Children’s Hospital New Orleans Hotline for School Wellness and Virtual Care COVID-19 hotline (504.837.7760) to make a testing appointment. Symptomatic teachers and staff may continue to access free COVID-19 testing via a partnership with Ochsner Health System. Additional details regarding how symptomatic individuals may access testing and care will be distributed directly to schools prior to the start of the school year.

Routine Testing

All unvaccinated students, teachers, and staff are strongly encouraged to participate in routine, weekly molecular testing, for the virus that causes COVID-19. Schools should prioritize testing participation among participants in interscholastic sports, band, chorus, and other extracurricular activities that may either involve removal of masks or engaging with individuals outside of the immediate school community. Routine testing will be available at any public-school campus by request. Details regarding the mobile testing program, to be executed in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Health and local health partners, will be provided directly to schools prior to the start of the school year.

Vaccination

Vaccines against the virus that causes COVID-19 are promising because of the potential to decrease rates of disease, hospitalization, and death.

All eligible unvaccinated students, teachers, and staff are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated. Mobile vaccination services will be available at any public-school campus by request. Details regarding the mobile vaccination program, to be executed in partnership with local health partners, will be provided directly to schools prior to the start of the school year. In addition, the city has a list of vaccination locations anyone can access [here](#).

For additional information on the benefits of vaccination, please click [here](#).

For more information on public health measures to protect against COVID-19 after vaccination, please click [here](#).

PREPARATION AND ACTIONS FOR CONFIRMED OR SUSPECTED CASES OF COVID-19

Upon review of best practices included in the [LDOE Reopening Guidelines](#) and in consultation with public health experts, the following guidelines should be used when a child, staff member or visitor is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19.

Before the start of school all schools should:

- Establish an area that can be used to isolate [sick](#) students, staff, or visitors. This should be an area that is distinct from the area used for first aid or medication dispensing if possible, so those activities can continue unaffected.
- Develop a [cleaning and disinfection process](#) for if someone is sick at school.
- Communicate with parents and staff about [what to do when you are sick](#).
- Actively encourage staff and students who are sick or who have had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 to stay home.
- Provide parents a [checklist](#) to document that children have no symptoms every morning and no other family members are ill at home.
- Share information with staff, students, and families on the proper use, wearing, removal, and cleaning of cloth face coverings. CDC offers information to assist with selection of appropriate masks [here](#).
 - It is important to note that children should not wear face coverings when asleep or unconscious (such as during nap time in lower grade levels).
- Develop systems for notifying staff, families, and the public as needed if a person with COVID-19 was on the school premises while infectious. Do this in coordination with local health officials while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with FERPA and all other state and federal laws.

When a Child, Staff Member, or Visitor Becomes Sick at School:

- Implement isolation measures and act swiftly to ensure the sick person leaves campus quickly and safely.
 - School health staff (school nurses) should wear appropriate PPE including mask, gloves, and eye protection while caring for the sick individual.
 - Consider transportation needs to ensure students with limited means to personal transportation can be returned home safely.
 - Individuals who display symptoms of COVID-19 should obtain a molecular COVID-19 test.
- Follow with a cleaning and disinfecting process. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a [framework](#) for cleaning and disinfectant practices.
- Once schools are notified of a **confirmed case** or a **suspected case** (an individual Shows symptoms of COVID-19 who does not have a negative molecular test result for COVID-19 or documentation from a physician of an alternative diagnosis) that has not been cleared in 48 hours in their school community (student or staff member) either through public health contact tracing or family notification, the school is to report this incident in accordance with the required reporting protocols on page 7 of this guidance.
- All **unvaccinated** students and staff who have been in a classroom with a **confirmed case** or who otherwise have had [close contact](#) (defined as within 6 feet for 15 or more minutes) with a confirmed case or a symptomatic person with a known exposure will need to be quarantined at home for a minimum of 10 days. In such instances, the School Nurse should call the Children's Hospital New Orleans Hotline for School Wellness and Virtual Care COVID-19 hotline (504.837.7760) to determine any additional steps related to communication, quarantining practices, internal-to-school contact tracing, or enhanced cleaning or disinfection processes.

- Current guidance from the CDC about measures to take following exposure can be found [here](#) and isolation and self-quarantine recommendations from the Louisiana Department of Health can be found [here](#).
 - Please note that NOLA Public Schools' guidance does not permit return to school until at least 10 days of symptom-free quarantine have passed.
- Schools should use [screening decision trees](#) produced by New Orleans Children's Hospital for unvaccinated students, teachers, or staff who are identified as close contacts of a confirmed case OR for anyone (vaccinated or unvaccinated) who may show symptoms of COVID-19.
- If a teacher or student *within a "static group"* is a confirmed case this would require the **unvaccinated** members of the "static group" to self-quarantine for a minimum of 10 days.
- If a teacher or student is a confirmed case or symptomatic person with a known exposure in a school that is *not using "static groups,"* all **unvaccinated** teachers, school staff and students that maintained less than 6 feet of social distancing for 15 minutes or more may be required to self-quarantine for a minimum of 10 days.
- COVID-19-vaccinated students or staff do not need to quarantine after being identified as a close contact if they;
 - Are fully vaccinated (more than or equal to 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or more than or equal to 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine), AND
 - Have remained asymptomatic since the current COVID-19 exposure.
 - If these conditions are not met, the previously vaccinated individual needs to quarantine.
 - Individuals who become symptomatic within a 14-day period following exposure to someone with COVID-19 should immediately self-isolate, follow guidance for symptomatic individuals, and should get a molecular COVID-19 test.
 - Additional CDC guidance and information related to exposures among vaccinated individuals can be found [here](#).

School Communication Requirements:

Once a confirmed case or a symptomatic person with known exposure is identified, schools are responsible for communicating to students, families, and staff if they were in close contact with that person, and to provide general information to their school community. Schools should follow the steps below outlining required communication when a confirmed case is identified:

- Schools should rely on the Louisiana Department of Health Region 1 Office if additional help is needed to identify close contacts.
- Schools are required to communicate to students and staff members that were identified as "close contacts" to the confirmed case or symptomatic person with known exposure, and schools must require the close contacts to self-quarantine for 10 days.
 - The Louisiana Department of Health has created a communication template for those identified as close contacts, this template will need to be altered for communications to staff members. The communication template can be found [here](#).
 - Be advised the quarantine requirement will need to be changed from 14 to 10 days.
- Schools are required to provide a general message to their school community once a known case is identified with general information only (not personal identifiers).
- NOLA Public Schools will track information from all schools regarding the number of confirmed cases. This information will be made public weekly on our website to ensure transparency. The NOLA PS COVID-19 Tracker can be found [here](#).

When a Child or Staff Member Becomes Sick at Home:

- Parents should continue to monitor children for [symptoms](#) every morning and ensure no other family members at home are ill before sending children to school.
- In the event that a child shows COVID-like symptoms, parents should call the Children’s Hospital New Orleans Hotline for School Wellness and Virtual Care COVID-19 hotline (504.837.7760) to determine if any additional steps related to testing, or quarantining practices are needed. If needed, Children’s Hospital staff and the State of Louisiana Department of Health contact tracers will conduct contact tracing activities, including school-based contacts, for confirmed cases.
- If your child is a confirmed case, contact your child’s school to notify them of the child’s health status.
- All **unvaccinated** students and staff who have been in a classroom with a **confirmed case**, either through contract tracing or family notification, or who otherwise have had close contact (defined as within 6 feet for 15 or more minutes) with a **confirmed case or a symptomatic person with a known exposure** will need to be quarantined at home for a minimum of 10 days after exposure. These situations should also be referred to Children’s Hospital New Orleans Hotline for School Wellness and Virtual Care COVID-19 hotline (504.837.7760) to determine additional steps. Further guidance from the CDC about measures to take following exposure can be found [here](#).
- It is important to remember that any unvaccinated person who has close contact with someone with COVID-19 should stay home for 10 days after exposure based on the time it takes to develop illness. Click [here](#) for more information.
 - Please note that NOLA Public Schools’ guidance does not permit return to school by unvaccinated individuals until at least 10 days of symptom-free quarantine have passed.

Returning to School after Illness:

Students and staff who have been sick with COVID-like symptoms can return to school once conditions as identified in the Return to School Self-Certification for COVID-19 form are met. The form can be found [here](#) and should be presented to the school before the student or staff member returns to school or work.

- Be advised, LDH has not updated the close contact quarantine requirement in this letter from 14 days to 10. Those identified as close contacts are only required to quarantine for 10 days before returning to school or work.

Questions about return to school practices should be referred to the Children’s Hospital New Orleans Hotline for School Wellness and Virtual Care COVID-19 hotline (504.837.7760). Notably, people with conditions that weaken their immune system might need to stay home longer than described above, and those individuals should consult with their healthcare provider for more information.

School Closure Decisions:

School District administrators, appropriate public health officials (e.g., the State of Louisiana Regional Medical Director), and contracted public health experts will consult with schools prior to finalizing a decision to close an individual school as a safety measure. If a school has more than one positive case at a single school site, they must report the information regarding those cases to NOLA PS Medical Advisor and the Region 1 Office of the Louisiana Department of Health per the guidance on page 7 of this document.

In the event of a school closure, it is critically important that schools be able to pivot from in-person to distance learning so that disruption can be minimized while students and staff need to be away from a school building for extended periods of time. Please see additional guidance [here](#) for considerations for students with disabilities excluded during school closure.

