



PPSD Health and Safety Guidance for the 2021-22 School Year

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Overview

The purpose of this document is to outline health and safety guidance for Providence Public Schools (PPSD) for the 2021-2022 school year. This document is based on guidance ([initial](#) and [revised](#)) provided by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH); guidance in this document is not intended to conflict or supersede guidance provided by RIDE or RIDOH, but rather provide greater detail on PPSD specific policies. This document will be updated as external guidance or internal policy are adjusted. We will continue to monitor public health conditions and CDC recommendations and adjust this guidance accordingly. Additional guidance will be provided to principals/supervisors and staff members.

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A. Spacing and Grouping

Spacing and grouping guidelines are affected by vaccine eligibility and public health conditions. Guidance will change as public health conditions change and/or vaccine eligibility expands.

1. Classroom settings

Elementary schools should use a stable group model as feasible, keeping students from the same classroom together as much as possible throughout the day. When keeping in stable groups, physical distancing is not required within those stable groups but 6 feet of distance should be maintained between different stable groups. In instances where elementary schools do not have stable groups, physical distancing of at least 3 feet is recommended as much as possible. At the elementary level, there may be instances where small groups of students are integrated into other classrooms to support inclusive practices (e.g., students in self-contained classrooms joining their peers for art, music, and physical education).

For middle and high school groups, physical distancing is not required but students should be spaced as much as possible.

School staff are allowed to travel between different classrooms at all grade levels. Teachers should continue to have seating charts with assigned student seats as much as possible to assist with case investigation and contact tracing if needed.

The use of physical barriers in classrooms is no longer recommended by the CDC.

2. Shared Spaces, Cafeteria and Recess

Outdoor learning experiences and dining are encouraged whenever possible. For elementary stable groups, at least 3 feet of physical distance between stable groups is recommended for indoor activities in shared spaces. Please note: If schools choose to distance stable groups less than 6 feet, there may be an increase in the number of close contacts between the stable pods if there was a positive COVID-19 case.

Schools are able to use cafeterias for meal service and dining. Schools can utilize combinations of cafeteria space and classroom space for dining depending on available space and coverage. When dining, the following spacing guidelines should be followed:

- Stable groups: students should have consistent, assigned seating with members of their stable group where possible. Students should be spaced at least 2-3 feet apart with 6 feet between tables as much as possible.
- Non-stable groups: students should have consistent, assigned seating. Students should be spaced 3 feet apart as much as possible.

B. Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Hand Hygiene

Schools should utilize the [CDC Guidance](#) for cleaning, disinfection, and hand hygiene. As of 7/20/21, this guidance includes:

- Limit sharing of high touch objects that are difficult to regularly clean (such as, electronic devices, pens, pencils, books, games, art supplies, lab equipment).
- Individuals should wash their hands, particularly at key times such as after bathroom breaks, before lunch, after playing outside, or after using shared materials.
- Provide hand sanitizer, particularly near frequently touched surfaces.
- Limit the use of “soft” materials such as rugs and bean bag chairs

1. Cleaning protocols

Standard cleaning

PPSD and Aramark have hired additional staff members who will provide additional cleaning throughout the day for school buildings. Staff members will clean high touch surfaces and objects (such as, door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains) at least once a day or as often as needed (for example, when visibly dirty) as well as bathrooms. Additionally, First Student will provide enhanced cleaning for buses between bus runs and at the end of the day, including the wiping of high touch surfaces.

“Level 2” Cleaning

In the event of a probable COVID-19 case during the school day (i.e., a staff member or student displays symptoms indicative of a probable COVID-19 case in a school building), staff members or students should be temporarily relocated to another space in the building. Aramark will conduct a cleaning of the classroom including a cleaning of high touch surfaces and ventilation measures described below ([J. Ventilation](#)).

“Level 3” Cleaning

In the event of a confirmed positive COVID-19 case where the student or staff member were in the building within the last 24 hours, Aramark will conduct a “Level 3”, deep cleaning. This includes a deep cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces within the classroom and ventilation measures described below ([J. Ventilation](#)). Aramark will leave a cleaning slip on the door to confirm the Level 3 cleaning has been completed.

C. Masks

All school-based staff members and students are required to wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. Mask use is generally not required outdoors; however, if outdoor activities involve sustained close contact between individuals not in the same stable group (<3 feet distance for 15 minutes or more), masks should be worn by adults and students who are not vaccinated.

Mask-wearing exceptions will be made for the following categories of people:

1. Children under the age of 2 years.
2. A person with a disability who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).
3. A person for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty as determined by the relevant workplace safety guidelines or federal regulations.

Staff members who believe they qualify for an exception under items 2 and 3 must contact Ray Lambert (Raymond.Lambert@ppsd.org) to review and approve/deny the request. Similarly, students should contact their school nurse to review and approve/deny the request.

Vendors and visitors will also need to wear masks regardless of vaccination status.

D. Symptom Screening

Students and staff members who are sick and/or have symptoms that indicate a probable COVID-19 case should stay home, contact their health provider, and get a test. Staff and parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to monitor their children for symptoms of infectious illness every day through home-based symptom screening. Schools must post symptom signage at the entrance(s) of their building.

E. School Visitors

Visitors may enter the school building. A 30-day log of all visitors is required for contact tracing. Logs should document the date, contact phone number, and arrival/departure times. All visitors must comply with the LEA's or school's COVID-19 policies and protocols. All visitors must wear masks at all times.

F. Before and Afterschool Programming

If the program is licensed by the Department of Human Services (DHS), then the program needs to follow the DHS regulations and guidelines. If the program is not run by DHS, but is located at the school and sponsored by the school, the program must follow the same health and safety guidelines the school is following.

G. Field Trips

Field trips can resume as long as the necessary COVID-19 health and safety policies are met. Stable groups should remain consistent during field trips. This means the same classroom groups participate as a stable group in field trip activities as much as possible.

H. Busing and Student Transportation

There are no capacity restrictions for school transportation. It is recommended that household members sit together in the same seat when possible. Bus staff should continue to create distance between children on school buses when possible. Students using the bus are scheduled as a stable group, and the bus group is considered its own stable group.

Masks are required by federal order on school buses and other forms of public transportation in the United States.

Bus personnel should continue to have seating charts with assigned student seats as much as possible to assist with case investigation and contact tracing if needed. When feasible, the same group of students should be assigned to the same bus every day. Students are encouraged to ride the same bus to and from school whenever possible.

Staff members should open windows to improve ventilation when it does not create a safety hazard. When a passenger is confirmed to have COVID-19 (tests positive), there may be up to 29 close contacts of the person who may need to quarantine. On a bus, close contacts of a confirmed case are those who were seated two rows in front, two rows behind, and the same five rows on opposite side of the aisle as the positive case (see the Outbreak Response Playbook: PK-12 for reference). Anyone within 6 feet of the individual for greater than 15 minutes is a close contact.

I. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Schools will receive an adequate supply of PPE for all classrooms and office spaces, including:

- Reusable masks to distribute to all staff members and students.
- Disposable masks for students or staff members who have forgotten their cloth masks.
- Hand sanitizer for all classrooms, offices, and shared spaces where sinks/handwashing stations are not available.
- Disinfectant spray for all classrooms, offices and shared spaces.
- Signage for entryways and hallways to support social distancing.
- Face shields upon request.
- Gowns and gloves for school nurses.

Schools will receive a supply of the above to cover all classrooms, with replenishment happening through the school year. Staff members should contact their principal or supervisor if additional PPE is required, which will be replenished from the central warehouse.

If any staff have underlying immunocompromised conditions, they may wish to consult their doctor about any additional PPE. When in close contact with, or treating, a patient suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, recommended PPE includes N-95 respirator (or face mask if N-95 is unavailable), eye protection (goggles or face shield), gloves, and gown.

J. Ventilation

To support building ventilation during the COVID-19 pandemic, all classrooms are equipped with air purifiers utilizing MERV13 filters that meet or exceed CDC recommendations regarding air changes per hour (ACH). Each school will have an adequate allotment of replacement filters for air purifier units; school custodians will change when a replacement is necessary. Air purifiers should be placed at least 2 feet from the wall and should be turned on to maximum ventilation rates.

In addition, for school-buildings with air conditioning we will be increasing outside air intake as well as running the buildings on “occupied” mode for longer periods of time prior to the school day. Classrooms without air conditioning may utilize window fans to increase airflow as well.

Opening windows and or doors when the weather permits helps improve ventilation and reduce viral transmission. Cross-ventilation is ideal and can be achieved with fans placed in windows or with combinations of open doors and windows. Ventilation is improved with each additional inch a window is opened. Using air purifiers and opening windows/doors to increase ventilation will allow for the greatest improvement in classroom ventilation.

K. Responding to Students and Staff Members who are Sick

[KEY REVISIONS FROM JANUARY 6 GUIDANCE UPDATE]

Schools should continue to follow [The Outbreak Response Protocols: PreK-12](#). Students and staff members who are sick and/or have symptoms that indicate a probable COVID-19 case should stay home, contact a healthcare provider, and get tested.

1. Symptomatic individuals

If a student or staff member is sick and is a probable COVID-19 case, they should not come to school or work and get tested. If a student or school-based staff member tests positive, he or she should contact his/her school nurse; central office-based staff members should contact Donna O'Connor.

If a student exhibits COVID-19 symptoms that indicate a probable case at school, the student should be relocated to the school's isolation room. If a staff member exhibits COVID-19 symptoms, he or she should notify his/her supervisor and go home for the day before getting tested.

2. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19

Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, should stay home and isolate for at least 5 days. Then they may:

- Return to school on day 6, if they don't have symptoms or their symptoms are improving, and they've been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medication). They should wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days at school, at home, and with others; or
- Isolate at home until their symptoms are improving and they've been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication). They should wear a well-fitting mask at school and at home for the remainder of the 10-day period from symptom onset or specimen collection date if they are asymptomatic.

3. Individuals who are close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case

Staff and students age 18 and older who are identified as close contacts are exempt from quarantine and should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days if they don't have symptoms and have

- Received a vaccine booster dose;
 - Completed the two-dose primary series of Pfizer within the last 5 months;
 - Completed the two-dose primary series of Moderna within the last 6 months; or
 - Completed the one-dose primary series of J&J vaccine in the last 2 months.
- *If they develop symptoms, they should isolate at home and get tested.

Students age 5-17 who are identified as close contacts are exempt from quarantine and should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days if they have don't have symptoms and have:

- Completed the two-dose primary series of Pfizer or Moderna more than 14 days prior the exposure date.
- *If they develop symptoms, they should isolate at home and get tested.

Students and staff without symptoms, who are identified as close contacts, and aren't exempt from quarantine will follow the Monitor to Stay quarantine protocol, which allows students and staff to

attend school in person and participate in school-related extracurricular activities during their quarantine period. In this case, they should:

- Conduct symptom screening and attest that they don't have symptoms for 5 days;
- Follow quarantine guidance when outside school, as well as updated CDC guidance about masking

Please note that Monitor to Stay will only be done for close contacts identified within schools; if an individual is a close contact of a positive individual outside of school (e.g., a household member), that individual should quarantine at home and return on day 6 if no symptoms.

4. Quarante exemptions

An exposed person (close contact) who was within 6 feet of the infected person for at least 15 minutes over 24 hours needs to quarantine. Individuals who are not experiencing symptoms do not need to quarantine in the following situations:

1. The person previously had COVID-19 no more than 90 days prior to the last date of close contact exposure; or;
2. The person meets all of the Pre K-12 close contact exception criteria:
 - The close contact and infected person are both pre K-12 students;
 - The exposure occurred inside a pre K-12 classroom or structured outdoor pre K-12 setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with supervision);
 - Both students wore face masks at all times; and
 - Students were at least 3 feet apart from each other at all times; or
3. The person is a pre K-12 student or staff member and the exposure occurred at outdoor recess at a pre K-12 school; or
4. The exposure occurred on a pre K-12 school bus where windows were open, all persons on the bus wore face masks, and there was at least one other adult in addition to the driver present to monitor that masks were worn and windows were open.

All individuals who are close contacts and meet criteria to avoid quarantine must get tested, immediately after contact if unvaccinated or 5-7 days if vaccinated.

L. School-Based Testing

Students under 18 years of age will be required to submit a consent form for both asymptomatic and symptomatic testing.

1. Asymptomatic testing

PPSD schools will offer weekly asymptomatic testing for students and staff members on a voluntary basis.

2. Symptomatic testing

In addition to asymptomatic testing, nurses will have testing supplies should a student or staff member develop symptoms throughout the day, or in the event that multiple positive cases in a school necessitate additional testing of asymptomatic individuals.

M. Promoting Vaccination

Vaccination remains the most powerful strategy to keep children and families healthy and students learning and involved in extracurricular activities in person. Find more information at [C19vaccineRI.org](https://www.c19vaccineRI.org). RIDOH strongly encourages all eligible students, staff, and families to get vaccinated and boosted. Since the start of school, 91% of the students with COVID-19 infection were unvaccinated. Vaccination remains the best strategy to keep children in-school. Students and staff who aren't showing symptoms and are up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination are exempt from quarantine.