



A Union of Professionals

On July 9, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its [guidance](#) for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools, and on Aug. 2, the Department of Education released its companion “Return to School Roadmap” to support students, schools, educators and communities in preparing for the 2021-22 school year. As part of the launch of the Return to School Roadmap, the department released:

- A [fact sheet](#) for schools, families and communities on the Return to School Roadmap, reviewing the three “landmark” priorities, and elevating schools and districts that are addressing each in effective ways.
- A [guide](#) for schools and districts outlining what schools can do to protect the health and safety of students, including increasing access to vaccinations and steps for implementing the CDC’s recently updated K-12 school guidance.
- A [checklist](#) that parents can use to prepare themselves and their children for a safe return to in-person learning this fall.

CDC Updated Guidance

Science-based mitigation strategies. The CDC’s [science-based strategy](#) is an integrated package of tools to support safe school openings and protect teachers, students and school staff. The bedrock of this strategy, consistent with AFT recommendations since last April, is layered mitigation consisting of:

- [Promoting vaccination](#)
- [Consistent and correct mask use](#)
- [Physical distancing](#)
- [Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters and outbreaks](#)
- [Ventilation](#)
- [Hand-washing and respiratory etiquette](#)
- [Staying home when sick and getting tested](#)
- [Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine](#)
- [Cleaning and disinfection](#)

Using Community Transmission and Vaccine Coverage Data

In addition to the mitigation strategies above, the CDC is recommending school districts **work with local public health officials** to determine the prevention strategies needed by monitoring:

- [Levels of community transmission](#) (i.e., low, moderate, substantial or high);
- Local [vaccine coverage](#); and
- Use of [screening testing](#) to detect cases in K-12 schools.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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To accomplish this, the CDC recommends that administrators conduct workplace hazard assessments periodically to identify COVID-19 transmission risks and prevention strategies, when work-site conditions change, or when there are instances of COVID-19 transmission within the workplace.

If school administrators decide to remove any of the prevention strategies for their school based on local conditions, they should **remove them one at a time** and **monitor closely** (with adequate testing through the school and/or community) for any increases in COVID-19 cases.

The CDC recommends that school employers engage and train all workers on potential workplace hazards, the precautions that should be taken to protect workers, and workplace policies for reporting concerns.

CDC Guidance Top Lines

- Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in fall 2021 is a priority.
- Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- **Updated July 27:** Given new evidence on the B.1.617.2 (delta) variant, the CDC has [updated the guidance](#) for fully vaccinated people. The CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Children should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with layered prevention strategies in place.
- The CDC recommends schools maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by people who are not fully vaccinated, to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least three feet, such as when schools cannot fully reopen while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to **layer multiple other prevention strategies**, such as indoor masking.
- Students, teachers and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Many schools serve children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. Therefore, this guidance **emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently)** to protect people who are not fully vaccinated, including students, teachers, staff and other members of their households.
- COVID-19 prevention strategies remain critical to protect people, including students, teachers and staff who are not fully vaccinated, especially in areas of moderate-to-high community transmission levels.

Other Important Information

- **Accommodations**
 - Workers at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 include [older adults](#) and people of any age with certain [underlying medical conditions](#) if they are not fully vaccinated. Workers who have an underlying medical condition or are taking medication that weakens their immune system may NOT be fully protected even if fully vaccinated and may need to continue using additional prevention measures.

- When these conditions are disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers must provide reasonable accommodation subject to undue hardship.
- Schools should be supportive of people who are fully vaccinated, but choose to continue to wear a mask, as a personal choice or because they have a medical condition that may weaken their immune system.
- **Ventilation**
 - Ventilation is one component of [maintaining healthy environments](#), and is an important COVID-19 prevention strategy for schools and child care programs. Along with [other preventive actions](#), ventilation can reduce the likelihood of spreading disease.
 - The Department of Education’s [Roadmap](#) emphasizes that schools should use the American Rescue Plan’s \$122 billion for the [Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief Fund](#) to help schools prevent the spread of COVID-19 and address the needs of students, including improving ventilation in schools.
- **During school transportation**
 - [CDC’s order](#) applies to all public transportation conveyances, including school buses. Regardless of the mask policy at school, passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in CDC’s order.
 - For example, if a student attends a school where mask use is not required due to vaccination status (e.g., a high school with a high rate of vaccination), the student is still required to wear a mask on the school bus.
 - Schools should provide masks to those students who need them (including on buses), such as students who forgot to bring their mask or whose families are unable to afford them.

Relief Funding

The American Rescue Plan includes \$122 billion for the [Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief Fund](#) to help schools prevent the spread of COVID-19 and address the needs of students. To promote health and safety, among many other additional uses, these funds can be used to:

- Invest resources to implement health and safety guidance from the CDC to keep students and educators safe;
- Improve ventilation in schools, purchase personal protective equipment, and obtain additional physical space (e.g., mobile classroom units) to promote physical distancing in classrooms;
- Hire additional school personnel, including nurses and custodial staff, to help schools provide healthy environments for learning;
- Implement strategies to meet the social, emotional, mental health and academic needs of students hit hardest by the pandemic, including through evidence-based interventions and critical services; and
- Provide for physical distancing and safety protocols on school buses.