



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

Updated K-12 Health and Safety Guidance

5/18/2021

In an effort to align Rhode Island's guidance for schools with the CDC's guidance for operational strategies for schools ([CDC Transmission of COVID in schools](#); [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools](#)), as well as the Governor's Executive Orders, this document shall serve as the current health and safety guidance for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. This document should be used in lieu of the "Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island's Elementary and Secondary Schools". These revisions are based upon our belief that all students deserve the same access to in-person learning and increased understanding of COVID-19 and its limited spread in our highly mitigated school settings, national and local data and research, and increased vaccination rates.

** Note: According to the Executive Orders, PreK-12 schools and childcare providers may adopt policies that are stricter than State guidelines. Students and staff must follow this guidance.*

Ongoing Communication and Support

To support LEAs for the remainder of the school year and into the summer, RIDE will maintain the regional pod model of support. This structure allows every LEA and private school in Rhode Island to have a designated team who responds to questions and provides direct support. LEAs and private schools should continue to communicate their policies and practices to their school communities, especially as they host end-of-year events.

Distance Learning

For the remainder of this school year, LEAs should continue to provide high quality distance learning for students/families that have selected this option and those that must remain home for short periods of time due to illness or quarantine.

Class and Group Size Limits

- Elementary and Middle Schools Using a Pod Model: These students will be required to maintain stable groups of up to 30. This capacity includes both students and staff. It is still expected that individuals within stable groups maintain as much physical distance as possible, but minimally are spaced 3 feet from one another. Stable groups are designed to spend all or most of the day together as a group. Each stable group will be expected to physically distance at least 6 feet from every other stable group.
- It should be noted that if a middle school functions like a high school, and cannot maintain a stable group, then high school guidelines should be used.



- **High Schools:** Recognizing that it is more difficult to establish and maintain stable groups in a high school schedule, more than one approach is possible. Stable groups are recommended and should be maintained whenever possible (i.e., students should stay in the same classroom and teachers should rotate rooms whenever possible). If stable groups are not possible, high school students must maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between one another.
- **Groups in Larger Indoor or Outdoor Spaces:** For all grades, the number of people in indoor or outdoor school spaces depends on the number of students/staff that can fit in the space and still abide by the physical distancing requirements and fire code occupancy for the space. When more than one stable group is in the same space, the stable group should remain together and there should be 6 feet between the stable groups. In high schools, occupancy will be based on 3 feet of physical distance between individuals. It is also recommended to maintain 6 feet of distance between tables in cafeterias, treating the table as a stable group/pod. Schools are encouraged to utilize outdoor spaces whenever possible.
- **Close Contacts:** **The definition of a close contact has not changed.** In accordance with CDC guidance, in most instances, those who have been within 6 feet of a confirmed case for greater than 15 minutes will be deemed a close contact. As a result, a reduction in spacing between individuals will likely lead to the identification of more close contacts if there is a positive case within the classroom.

Classroom Layouts and Use of School Spaces

- **General Spacing and Movement:** Stable groups should occupy consistent space as much as possible. When shared space is used by multiple stable groups or by students who are not in stable groups, disinfecting should occur in between the times when stable groups or groups of students use the space.
- **Classroom Layout:** The spacing of desks/tables should allow for at least 3 feet of spacing between individual students/staff. The largest classes should be held in the largest spaces.
- **Assigned seating:** Teachers are required to have seating charts with assigned student seats.
- **Hallways:** Schools should continue to maintain their current plans to limit congestion within hallways.
- **Bathrooms:** Bathrooms should be cleaned and disinfected regularly in line with [CDC guidance](#).
- **Dining/Cafeterias:** For classrooms that have stable groups in place, lunch should take place in the same space as class activities when possible. Students at all grade levels must eat at least 3 feet away from one another. Strategies to limit the amount of time students are unmasked during lunchtime should be utilized. If more than one stable group utilizes the same larger space for meals at the same time, a minimum distance of 6 feet must be maintained at all times between stable groups. When possible, outdoor dining is encouraged.



Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene

Schools should utilize the [CDC Guidance](#) for cleaning, disinfection, and hand hygiene.

Face Coverings

In alignment with the [CDC recommendation](#), schools must continue to use the COVID-19 prevention strategies outlined in the current version of [CDC's Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools](#) for at least the remainder of the 2020-2021 academic school year. The only exception is that schools may allow individuals to remove their mask outdoors if they are able to easily, continuously, and measurably maintain at least 3 feet of distance from others (Executive Order [Continuing to Require Cloth Face Coverings in Public](#)). The [CDC's Guidance for Wearing Masks \[cdc.gov\]](#) should be used to determine the types of masks that are recommended, the benefits of masking, and who should be exempt from wearing a mask. Schools will need to procure extra face coverings for students and/or staff who do not have their own or who may forget them at home.

Screening Students and Staff

Schools must continue to require daily screening of COVID-19 symptoms by staff and students through self-attestation. Schools may wish to use the [Reopening RI self-attestation form](#). Parents must screen students at home prior to sending them to school. Temperature checks are no longer recommended.

School Visitors

Visitors may enter the school building, but limits should still be considered. A 30-day log of all visitors is required, and must 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.

Busing and Student Transportation

Unless noted below, all existing mitigation measures outlined in the [Transportation Guidance](#) should remain in place.

- Students are seated to physically distance as much as possible with a maximum occupancy of 75% of vehicle seating capacity for all vehicles used for student transport (e.g. school bus, van, or other vehicle).
- Household members should sit together in the same seat when possible.



- All students have assigned seats on the bus. Students are encouraged to ride the same bus to and from school whenever possible.
- When feasible, the same group of students should be assigned to the same bus every day. Locations for drop-off and pick-up should remain the same and drivers and staff helping with busing should remain the same for each bus as much as possible.
- 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). In addition, anyone within 6 feet of the individual for greater than 15 minutes is a close contact.

Specific School Activities

Recess

- Stable groups should remain consistent during any recess activities. This means the same classroom groups participate in recess activities as a stable group. If recess takes place in a large space, more than one stable group may share the space as long as 6 feet of physical distance can be maintained between the stable groups.
- Outdoor Recess:
 - a. Recess should occur outside, weather permitting.
 - b. For outdoor spaces, there is also no set maximum stable group size. The number of students/staff allowed is based on the physical distancing requirements within stable groups and between stable groups.
 - c. Students must wear masks during recess unless they are able to easily, continuously, and measurably maintain at least 3 feet of distance from others.
 - d. Students should wash their hands before and after recess.
 - e. If classroom groups share recess space, the groups should remain 6 feet apart from one another.

Before and After School 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.

Field Trips

Field trips can resume as long as the necessary face covering and social distancing requirements are met. Stable groups should remain consistent during field trips. This means the same classroom groups participate in field trip activities as a stable group. If a field trip takes place indoors, more than one stable group may share the space as long as 6 feet of physical distance can be maintained between groups.



Athletics

School athletic programs should follow the [Updated Youth, Adult, and School Sports Guidance](#) and the guidance established by the [Rhode Island Interscholastic League](#).

Music Performance and Theater

All performances must abide by masking and spacing outlined in [Executive Orders](#) and the [Safe Activities Regulations](#). Singing or playing wind and brass instruments generates respiratory droplets and aerosols that may contain the COVID-19 virus if a person is infected. This guidance outlines general considerations for music and performing arts groups.

Band and Other Musical Groups

- Maintain [physical distancing](#) to protect students and staff.
- Require the use of masks at all times by all students and staff during any music class or rehearsal, unless they are singing or playing an instrument that requires the use of their mouth.
- Consider conducting the class in an outdoor or open environment or under an open tent. If classes take place indoors:
 - a) Adhere to the current [facilities ventilation guidance](#).
 - b) Students should be all facing the same direction during rehearsals.
 - c) Practice good hygiene including hand washing, sanitizers, and preventing uncontrolled spit valve release.
- Consider having teachers use a portable amplifier to keep voices at a low, conversational volume.
- Limit the number of students in storage and backstage areas at one time.
- For indoor rehearsals, limit the amount of time to 30 minutes of playing or singing followed by a break to allow at least one air exchange to disperse any aerosol buildup (usually about 20 minutes). For outdoor rehearsals, allow a minimum of five minutes between each 30 minutes of playing.
- Conduct rehearsals in “pods” with the same students always rehearsing together.
- Strictly discourage the exchange or sharing of any instruments, parts, music sheets, etc.
- To minimize the generation of droplets and aerosols, consider using “bell covers” for the openings of wind instruments, and specially designed masks for musical instruments.
- Consider holding virtual or outdoor performances instead of indoor performances.

Theater Productions and Drama Club

- Maintain [physical distancing](#) to protect students and staff.
- Require the use of masks by all students and staff during any rehearsals or productions (other than those outlined in the latest Executive Orders) unless they are singing or playing an instrument that requires the use of their mouth.
- Limit the sharing of props, costumes, and wigs. Designate personal props to each individual and mark with name tags.
- Allow for 3 feet of physical distance between performers where possible.



- No sharing of voice projecting mechanisms such as microphones or headpieces. Even microphones and headpieces used by only one person should be disinfected after use.
- [Clean and disinfect](#) commonly used items and highly trafficked areas such as dressing rooms, green rooms, and production areas.
- Consider holding virtual or outdoor performances instead of indoor performances.
- Consider forming stable pods similar to classroom and bus transportation pods.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Staff must continue to wear face coverings as outlined above.
- For vaccinated staff working with students who are unable to wear face coverings (other than a face shield): In alignment with [CDC guidance](#), this staffing group can wear N95, KN95, or a well fitted medical procedure mask. Gowns and face shields are not recommended. 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.

Responding to Staff or Students who are Sick

- Schools should continue to follow [The Outbreak Response Protocols: PreK-12](#).
- As soon as possible, all items touched by the staff member or student who is ill at school must be removed, cleaned, and disinfected. Any common surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected as well. If possible, items should be moved, windows should be opened, or other measures should be instituted to increase ventilation while cleaning. Additional guidance can be found at [CDC: Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).