

Public Health Recommendations for Safer School Reopening

August 17, 2020

As part of a unified command response, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health (LDCPH) has developed the following COVID-19 risk-stratification tool to assist K-12 school districts and families in decision-making for the upcoming school year.

The recommendations contained within this tool are based on currently available science as well as guidance from various entities including [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [Kansas State Department of Education](#), [Kansas Department of Health and Environment](#), Kansas Health Partners and the University of Kansas Pandemic Medical Advisory Team.

These recommendations may also change as we learn more about the pandemic and how it affects our community. Utilizing the structure of a unified command response allows LDCPH, school districts and our partners to work closely together to continuously monitor community and school conditions and make adjustments as appropriate.

Because COVID-19 is a respiratory illness, meaning it is typically spread when respiratory droplets from an infected person (coughing, sneezing, talking) get into the mouths, noses or lungs of those nearby, our recommendations are focused on situations that could put students and staff at increased risk. We also feel it is important to account for the amount of disease circulating in the community, which is another way to measure potential risks within our schools.

At this time, the risk of becoming infected during school or school-related activities cannot be reduced to zero. We rely on **proven** mitigation strategies to reduce these risks. Schools must implement proper mask technique, adequate physical distancing, frequent hand hygiene, routine cleaning/disinfection and keeping people home when they're ill. Families, as well as faculty and staff, can increase the likelihood of a child's success by discussing the importance of and modeling safe behaviors.

Each family must also decide whether in-person instruction and activities are appropriate for their individual situation. The risks and benefits are not the same for everyone. Considerations may include health conditions of a child or family member that could put them at increased risk for severe disease. Families who elect for in-person instruction should complete this [checklist](#).

Although [earlier](#) studies have shown differences in transmission between older and younger age groups, [newer data](#) seems to bring that into question. And while younger children may be less likely to develop severe disease, significant illness, including death, is still possible. For these reasons, we do not recommend differences in school-related activities based on age.

While this guidance will not ensure that we have zero cases of COVID-19 in our schools, our response must recognize the interconnectedness of our approaches to contain the spread of the coronavirus. We have worked collaboratively with local government, health, education and business leaders to develop this guidance based on the best science and medical advice we currently have. Our work moving forward is to continue to learn and update this guidance so that we can best support parents, school children, teachers and administrators.

**Recommendations for In-Person School Instruction and Activities
Based on Risk Level and Community Transmission of COVID-19**

	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red
Criteria	% Positive Tests and New Cases based on 14 day rolling average, reported Thursdays by LDCPH ¹ Absenteeism is % increase compared to 2019-2020			
% Positive Tests ²	≤5%	>5% and ≤10%	>10% and ≤15%	>15%
New Cases ³	Stable or declining	Stable or declining	Stable or declining	Increasing
Absenteeism ⁴	≤3.0%	≤6%	≤10%	>10%
Staffing	Refer to district/school plans			Unable to meet needs
<i>All schools must have plan in place for safe reopening/readiness and ongoing assessments.</i> ⁵				
Elementary Schools	In-person ⁶ or Hybrid ⁷	Hybrid ⁷	Remote only No Sports/Extracurricular Activities	
Elementary Extracurricular Activities	Standard Mitigation ⁶	No all-school activities Limit number of students per group Attempt to maintain cohorts Must allow for masks and social distancing		
	Spectators must maintain distance with exception of household groups Spectator masks required if indoors Spectator masks required outdoors if not >10ft Capacity should be limited to allow for distancing			
Middle and High Schools	In-person ⁶ or Hybrid ⁷	Hybrid ⁷		
Middle and High School Extracurricular Activities	Standard Mitigation ⁶	No high-risk activities ⁸ Modified conditioning and practices ⁹ No group travel ¹⁰ Limitations on competitors ¹¹		
	Spectators must maintain distance with exception of household groups Spectator masks required if indoors Spectator masks required outdoors if not >10ft Capacity should be limited to allow for distancing			

References:

- ¹ Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health COVID-19 Dashboard:
<https://bit.ly/Smart-SafeDGCo>
- ² % Positive Tests is defined as number of positive tests out of all tests performed in Douglas County within the previous 14 days; Testing availability must remain stable or improving
- ³ New Cases is defined as the number of newly identified cases within the previous 14 days, based on date of symptom onset, expressed as rate per 100K Douglas County residents
- ⁴ Absenteeism is expressed as percent increase in student absenteeism compared to building-level Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for the same 14-day period in 2019-2020
- ⁵ Considerations for K-12 Schools: Readiness and Planning Tool:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/School-Admin-K12-readiness-and-planning-tool.pdf>
- ⁶ In-person considerations:
 Must have: Masks/barriers, distancing, hand hygiene and robust operating policies
 Recommended: Small groups (≤17) and cohorting
 Additional strategies:
 Limit movement of individuals: Teachers travel to cohorts
 Hold classes in large on-site areas (gym, auditorium) or empty classrooms if split in-person/remote, hold classes outside, work with community to identify off-site locations
- ⁷ Hybrid strategies (in addition to in-person⁷):
 Limit number of people on-site: Alternating days, staggered arrival/departure, reduced hours, defined populations (high risk conditions, children of essential workers, etc.)
- ⁸ Classification of Activities by Risk
 Higher Risk: Sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants, lack of significant protective barriers, and high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants.
Examples: wrestling, football, rugby, lacrosse, competitive cheer, dance, Basketball, soccer, water polo, ice hockey, field hockey,

 High Risk non-sport activities include band (with exception of percussion, strings), choir, cheerleading or any other unmasked singing or shouting

 Moderate Risk: Sports that involve close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants OR intermittent close contact OR group sports OR sports that use equipment that can't be cleaned between participants.
Examples: volleyball, baseball*, softball*, gymnastics* (if equipment can't be sufficiently cleaned between competitors), tennis*, swimming relays, pole vault*, high jump*, long jump*, crew with two or more rowers in shell, 7 on 7 football*
 *Could potentially be considered "Lower Risk" with appropriate cleaning of equipment and use of masks by participants

 Lower Risk: Sports that can be done with social distancing or individually with no sharing of equipment or the ability to clean the equipment between use by competitors.
Examples: Individual running events, throwing events (javelin, shot put, discus), individual swimming, golf, weightlifting, alpine skiing, sideline cheer, single sculling, cross country running (with staggered starts) Non-contact sports: tennis, pickleball, gymnastics, golf, disc golf.
- ⁹ Strict adherence of mitigation techniques (must wear mask at all times and maintain distance)
- ¹⁰ No group travel by bus or other collective means that does not allow for mitigation techniques
 Schools must consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events
 Social distancing (as required by state or local health department) will need to be maintained on buses/vans
 Multiple buses/vans and/or parental/guardian transportation will likely be needed
- ¹¹ Limited mixing of groups (e.g., restrict competitions by region, area of the state, no out-of-state)