

Wolf Administration Provides Updated Guidance to Safely Reopen Pennsylvania's Schools

Harrisburg, PA – Pennsylvania Department of Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine and Education Secretary Pedro Rivera today jointly announced updated guidance to help Pre-K to 12 schools prepare to reopen and safely educate students for in-person learning. Each school entity will determine if classes resume in person at school buildings, remotely or a combination of both options

“Our goal is to ensure a safe return to school for students, educators and staff by following best practices to mitigate the spread of the virus, including wearing face coverings and maintaining social distancing,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “In those instances when someone tests positive, public health staff from the department will immediately assist the school with risk assessment, isolation and quarantine recommendations, and other infection control recommendations.”

The guidance represents endorsed best public health practices related to social distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfecting in school settings. It also outlines how to accommodate individuals with disabilities or chronic conditions, procedures for monitoring symptoms, and responding to confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 in the school community.

“The health and safety of students, teachers and staff must be paramount as schools prepare for the upcoming school year,” said Secretary of Education Pedro A. Rivera. “The Department of Education has been focused on supporting schools with resources and best practices to help school leaders make informed decisions within their local contexts and in response to evolving conditions.”

The best practice recommendations for schools outlined by the departments of Health and Education include:

- Masks must be worn by students and staff at school and on the bus as required by the [order](#) signed by Sec. of Health Dr. Levine on July 1, with some exceptions. Masks can be removed to eat or drink.
- Students or caregivers should do a daily symptom screening before leaving for school.
- Students, teachers and other staff are strongly encouraged to follow social distancing throughout the day with 6 feet of separation between desks and other seating.
- If possible, hold classes in gyms, auditoriums, other large spaces or outdoors, where physical distancing can be maintained.
- Student seating should be facing in the same direction.
- Limit student interactions by staggering class times, creating one-way walking patterns in hallways, and, when feasible, keeping students in a classroom and rotating teachers instead.

- For breakfast and lunch, consider serving individually packaged meals in classrooms and avoid across-the-table seating. If meals are served in a cafeteria, sit students at least 6 feet apart.
- Limit the number of students on playgrounds at one time and encourage social distancing.
- Encourage the use of virtual gatherings, events, and extracurricular activities.

The [guidance](#) released today provides a list of best practices for schools to consider before the start of in-person classes.

The guidance for school sports is unchanged. Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear masks unless they can maintain 6 feet of separation outdoors. Athletes can remove masks during a workout or competition.

Today's guidance builds on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's [preliminary guidance](#) issued June 3 outlining steps schools must take before they may resume in-person instruction.

The preliminary guidance requires school districts, charter schools, regional charter schools, cyber charter schools, career and technical centers and intermediate units to develop a health and safety plan. The plans must be approved by the school's governing body and made available on the school's public website before bringing students and staff back to campus. Nonpublic schools are strongly encouraged to create plans tailored to their unique needs and post them on their websites.

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out for a life-sustaining reason, please wear a mask.

All Pennsylvania residents are encouraged to sign up for AlertPA, a text notification system for health, weather, and other important alerts like COVID-19 updates from commonwealth agencies. Residents can sign up online at www.ready.pa.gov/BeInformed/Signup-For-Alerts.

For more information about Pennsylvania's education policies and programs please visit the [Department of Education's website](#) or follow PDE on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Pinterest](#)