

July 29, 2021

Dear School Superintendent and Leadership,

I wanted to take the opportunity to share with you our most up-to-date information about return to learning for the 2021-2022 school year.

There will be no separate guidance from Larimer County Department of Health and Environment (LCDHE); we will follow the guidance released by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). That guidance, referred to as Colorado's Practical Guide for Operationalizing CDC's School Guidance, can be found here - <https://covid19.colorado.gov/practical-guide-for-operationalizing-cdc-school-guidance>.

We can all agree that uninterrupted, full-time, in-person learning in all our schools is paramount. While we must remain vigilant, particularly when considering potentially deadly COVID-19 variants that occur, we recognize there are fewer cases of COVID-19 at this time than earlier in the pandemic. We also know that vaccinations are our best defense against COVID-19.

Because in-person learning is so essential for students to thrive in our communities, CDPHE is recommending that quarantine may not be required in all situations when schools and communities meet certain levels of community-wide protection, such as high levels of vaccination. With present levels of vaccination, CDPHE is recommending limiting requirements for quarantine when contact is limited to routine classroom exposures in schools.

### **Communication and Collaboration to Support In-Person Learning**

LCDHE will continue to provide schools with resources and expertise, while also intervening in outbreaks when they occur. LCDHE will continue to work closely with our school partners to achieve the following:

- Provide data and trends to our community and schools so you can make informed decisions on how to best protect your students and staff.
- Conduct interviews with cases to minimize spread of the virus from those who are sick.
- Provide support and recommendations to control and prevent further spread of disease in situations where school-based transmission is evident.

- Continue weekly school meetings to disseminate educational materials and guidance and to address questions.
- Provide school-based COVID-19 vaccination clinics upon request and/or information about accessing available community clinics.

### **Lessons Learned and Vaccinations**

Throughout the pandemic we have learned many lessons, and we now have community data from what we saw in schools last year. Your school(s) did a great job keeping students and staff safe. Distancing, mask-wearing, quarantining and hand washing measures that were instituted helped most of our schools maintain very low case counts. We saw much of our spread from activities outside of the classroom; sports, parties, sleepovers, club practices, and playdates contributed to many of our cases in schools last year.

Many of our school-age students have been fully vaccinated, and we are optimistic that an increasingly high level of vaccination will help us keep cases low in our schools this year. However, we know we still have more work to do to increase vaccination rates and ensure that students have as many uninterrupted days at school as possible. We need vaccination more than ever with the highly contagious Delta variant that is now circulating in our community. It is important to remember that there is still time to get vaccinated and help protect students and teachers as we return to school this fall. For information regarding vaccination clinics or to request a clinic at your school, please visit our [vaccine webpage](#).

We know not everyone can be vaccinated, yet, and we are hopeful that once younger children are eligible, more and more of them will quickly be vaccinated. The higher our immunization rates are, the fewer disruptions there will be in our schools this year.

### **Implementing Layered Mitigation Measures**

According to CDPHE, the best practice to prioritize in-person learning involves implementing layered mitigation measures to help reduce the risk of disease spread among students, teachers, staff, and their household members. These layered measures include:

- Symptom screening. Students, teachers, or staff who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home and seek testing. Individuals should also stay home when experiencing any other acute illness (e.g., gastrointestinal) and refer to their healthcare provider for medical care as needed.
- Proper and frequent handwashing is encouraged.
- Cleaning and disinfection according to [CDC guidance](#).
- Masking, (please see the **Masking** section below).
- Testing, (please see the **Testing** section below).
- Improved ventilation according to [CDC guidance](#).

## Outbreaks

The biggest change we'll see is in classroom closures. There won't be as many this year unless we have an outbreak situation, which happens when there are 5 or more unrelated cases identified in a classroom or school-associated activity. CDPHE *requires* local public health to implement interventions to mitigate outbreaks. Interventions can be in the form of:

- increased testing
- mask-wearing
- targeted quarantine
- classroom closures
- restriction of certain activities
- other public health interventions

We are still working through these details with school health staff to make sure we have mitigation plans in place at the start of the school year. We learned last year that the faster we provide mitigation measures, the more we prevent additional cases and the more we minimize disruptions. Testing will also be a part of mitigation and outbreak response, and we are working through those details, as well.

## Masking

As of July 28, 2021, the CDC recommends mask-wearing for all individuals age two and older when they are indoors. CDPHE asks that school districts consider mask requirements for unvaccinated individuals, particularly in higher-risk environments. We know students and staff are making a choice to protect themselves and others by continuing to wear masks, and we want them to feel comfortable doing so. We look to our communities to be mask-friendly and support families who want their children masked in schools and activities.

## Testing

Testing can be used as part of a layered mitigation strategy to support in-person learning as it enables schools to identify infected individuals and isolate them away from other students and learning environments. Testing also keeps local governments, schools, and the community informed about levels of transmission that are occurring. CDPHE will be announcing voluntary options for serial testing at schools very soon. For more information on testing, please contact LCDHE's Clinical Task Force Lead, Andrea Clement-Johnson, at [clemenal@co.larimer.co.us](mailto:clemenal@co.larimer.co.us).

## Additional Resources

- CDPHE's [Practical Guidance for Operationalizing CDC's School Guidance](#)
- CDPHE's [Addressing Symptoms at School](#) and [Return to Learn](#) guidance documents following a positive [COVID-19 symptom screen](#).
- CDPHE's [School FAQs](#)

- CDPHE's [How to Isolate](#)
- CDC's [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- CDC's [Scientific Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs](#)
- CDC's [Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation](#)
- CDC's [Your Guide to Masks](#)
- [Colorado COVID-19 Case and Outbreak Definitions](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics [The Science Behind COVID-19 Vaccines Parent FAQ's](#)

As we continue to prepare for the school year, LCDHE will provide additional written guidance addressing specific situations as schools operationalize CDPHE and CDC guidance. Follow-up communications will provide additional measures for implementation of mitigation strategies and will review high risk exposures. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to LCDHE's Outbreak Task Force Lead, Jacob Carson, at [carsonja@co.larimer.co.us](mailto:carsonja@co.larimer.co.us).

Thank you for your collaboration and efforts for a safe return to in-person learning. The 2021-2022 school year will look quite different from last year. As with most everything throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, new information is rapidly evolving, and as data is available, we will continue to communicate all information to you as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas R. Gonzales". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the start of the name.

Tom Gonzales, MPH  
Public Health Director