REOPENING SCHOOLS

HEALTH GUIDANCE BY COVID-19 PHASE

STAY AT HOME

SAFER AT HOME

PROTECT OUR NEIGHBORS

CDPHE, CDE and the Governor's Office worked together to develop this guidance for Local Public Health agencies (LPHAs) and districts as they develop school plans. The guidance has been drafted in light of evolving scientific knowledge about the spread of COVID-19 among children and in schools, as well as real-world disease control knowledge acquired through months of experience at the state and local level. Input has been solicited from both internal and external stakeholders, and their invaluable comments and suggestions have been instrumental in developing practical, broadly applicable guidance.

The guidance is organized by the level of COVID-19 incidence in the community: Stay at Home (high level of COVID-19), Safer at Home (mid-level of COVID-19), and Protect Our Neighbors (lower level of COVID-19).

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GOALS

1. Maximize in-person learning in as safe and healthy way as possible.
2. Ensure a reasonable level of safety for students and staff for in-person learning.
3. Minimize disruptions to education by facilitating timely responses to COVID-19 through cohorting students and staff when possible, screening for symptomatic individuals, and coordinating closely with local and state public health agencies.
4. Ensure equity in educational opportunity by considering learning and health needs of all students, including those with varying health conditions, economic backgrounds, language skills, or educational needs.
5. Encourage flexibility, adaptation, and innovation as schools develop novel approaches to disease control appropriate to local contexts and as scientific knowledge about COVID-19 transmission and control develops.

GUIDANCE RATIONALE

- Global COVID-19 evidence suggests that younger children play a smaller role in onward transmission of COVID-19[1]. The risk of transmission between young children and from young children to adults is lower, than the risk of transmission to adults between or from older children and adults. The risk to children is likely lower than that of yearly influenza, accounting for both primary disease and Multisystem Inflammatory Disease in Children (MIS-C). This is why kindergarten and elementary schools should have different guidelines than secondary schools.

- The risk of transmission between children and from children to adults is low, and the risk of transmission to adults is greater from other adults with either symptomatic or asymptomatic infection. Therefore, the most important limit to classroom size for adults is the number of adults required to be in close proximity.

- Given the limited role young children likely play in transmission, there likely is minimal benefit relative to the great difficulty of physical distancing young children within a class to prevent COVID-19 spread. (American Academy of Pediatrics) Moreover, physical distancing has the potential to negatively impact appropriate child development in this age group. Therefore, focus should be placed on other risk mitigation strategies that better complement the learning and socialization goals of children up through 5th grade. In secondary schools there is likely a greater impact of physical distancing on risk reduction of COVID-19.

- Cohorting significantly reduces the number of students and staff who will need to be excluded in the event of a case of COVID-19 in a school by limiting the number of close contacts of each individual (all of whom will need to be quarantined up to 14 days if they have close contact with a case). Considerations about the number of close contacts should be included in decisions about transportation and activities as well.

- For COVID-19, a close contact is defined as any individual who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes, starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated. However, members of the same classroom cohort may be considered “close contacts,” even if desk spacing is greater than 6-foot.

- Protection efforts applied collectively (for example social distancing AND masking AND cohorting) will provide stronger protection than any one effort in isolation as it will reduce the transmission of disease and minimize the disruption to in-person learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who has the authority to declare the phase in a county?

Local public health agencies (LPHAs) may declare the phase for their county/area using the Stay, Safer, and Protect Complete Framework metrics. Note: The Protect Our Neighbors phase requires a request for certification to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for approval. A county may seek to qualify for Protect Our Neighbors by themselves, or voluntarily form a "region" with neighboring counties who choose to submit for a certification together. To enter Protect Our Neighbors, counties must qualify by meeting scientifically established metrics. If a county that has entered Protect Our Neighbors falls out of compliance with any one of the metrics, they have three weeks to implement their containment plan and reestablish compliance.

What does "require" mean in these phases?

Executive Orders, issued by the Governor's Office and State Public Health Orders, issued by the state or local government, are legal requirements that apply to all Coloradans. Local public health agencies and local governments can choose to enact stricter guidance than the state. In some cases, local governments may seek and be granted a variance from the state's orders that may allow for looser restrictions. Public health guidance, such as this document, and the CDE Toolkit provide many examples and strategies for schools to comply with orders. At the local school level, districts, BOCES, and charters may also adopt policies related to COVID-19 that include tighter restrictions.

Do local public health agencies approve district or school fall opening plans?

No, unless required by the LPHA.

Who has the authority to intervene if a district or school is not following requirements or guidance within Executive Orders issued by the Governor's Office and/or Public Health Orders issued by the state or local government?

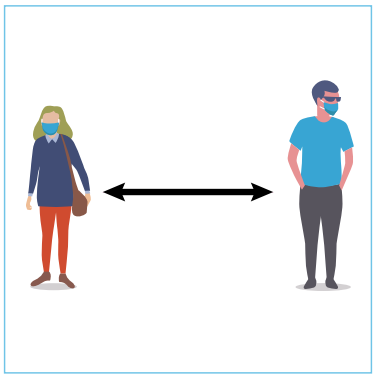
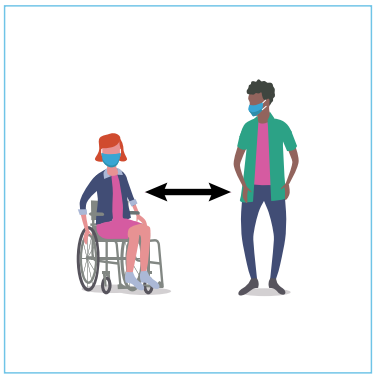
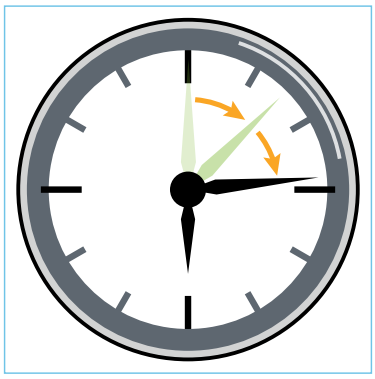
The LPHA has the authority to enforce requirements in Executive Orders and Public Health Orders. Likewise, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has the authority to enforce requirements in Executive Orders and Public Health Orders.

How do the executive and public health orders, this guidance and the CDE toolkit all fit together?

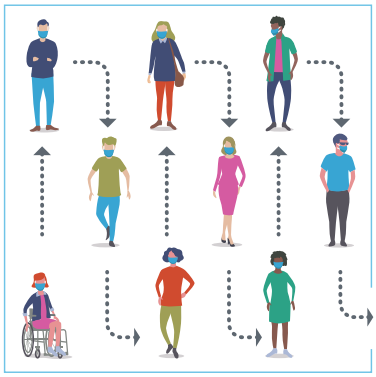
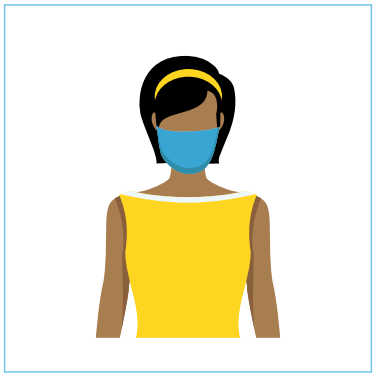
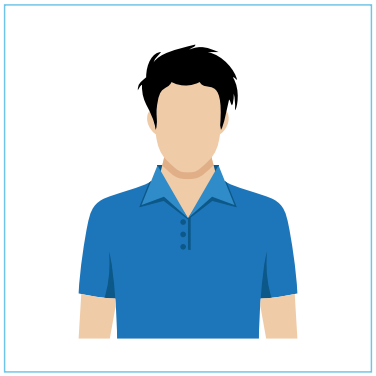
The Executive Orders and Public Health Orders set the policies we all need to follow. This "phased" guidance is designed to help LPHAs and districts make local decisions about school on health and safety precautions that meet the requirements of the Executive and Public Health Orders. The CDE toolkit is a broader set of ideas, resources and guidance on a myriad of other topics concerning school in the era of COVID-19. If provided, LPHA guidance is specific health guidance or orders for your local community, and ultimately they all help districts plan for operating safely this school year.

COVID-19 TRANSMISSION MITIGATION TACTICS

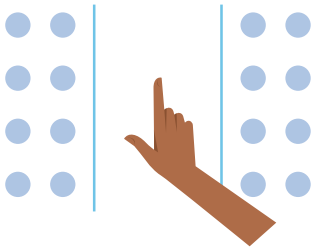
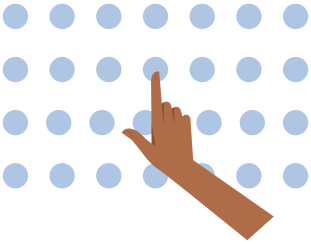
There are multiple approaches to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. As feasible, use all of the transmission mitigation tactics below. When it is not feasible to use all of the mitigation tactics, consider how to layer them. For instance, if students cannot remain 6-foot apart, cohort students. Cohorting is the most important strategy to keep schools open. If strict cohorts cannot occur, some cohorting is better than none. In addition, consider layering other tactics, such as masks, to reduce transmission risk. Deciding how to implement multiple layers of protection is specific to the local school/district community and grade level. Additional grade-level-specific guidance, based on the health guidance by COVID-19 phase, is provided in the charts below.

	LOWER RISK	HIGHER RISK
Distance 6-foot +	 6 feet or more distance	 Less than 6 feet distance
Duration	 Less than 15 minutes	More than 15 minutes

COVID-19 TRANSMISSION MITIGATION TACTICS

	LOWER RISK	HIGHER RISK
Movement	 Directed Movement	Undirected Movement
Congestion	Open	Tight
Mask	 Wearing Mask	 Not Wearing Mask

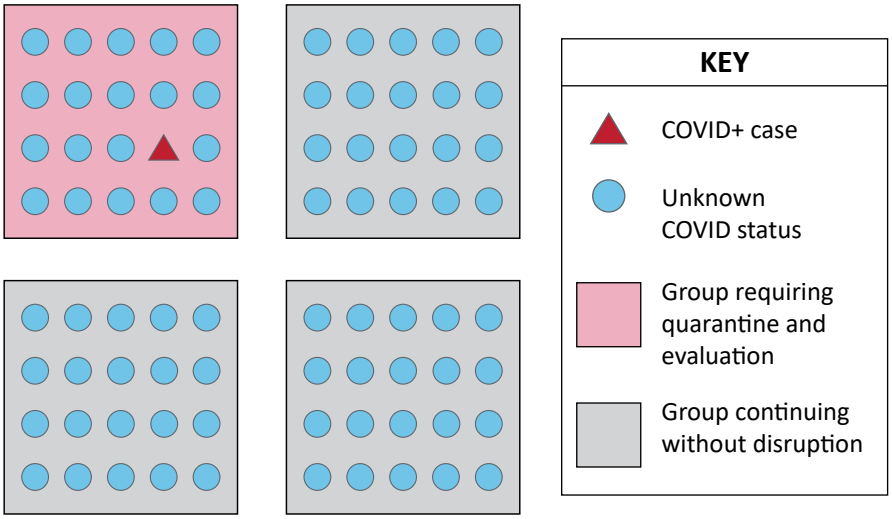
COVID-19 TRANSMISSION MITIGATION TACTICS

	LOWER RISK	HIGHER RISK
Group Size	Less than recommended	Greater than recommended
Respiratory Output	Normal Output	Increased Output
Touch	 Lower Touch	 Higher Touch

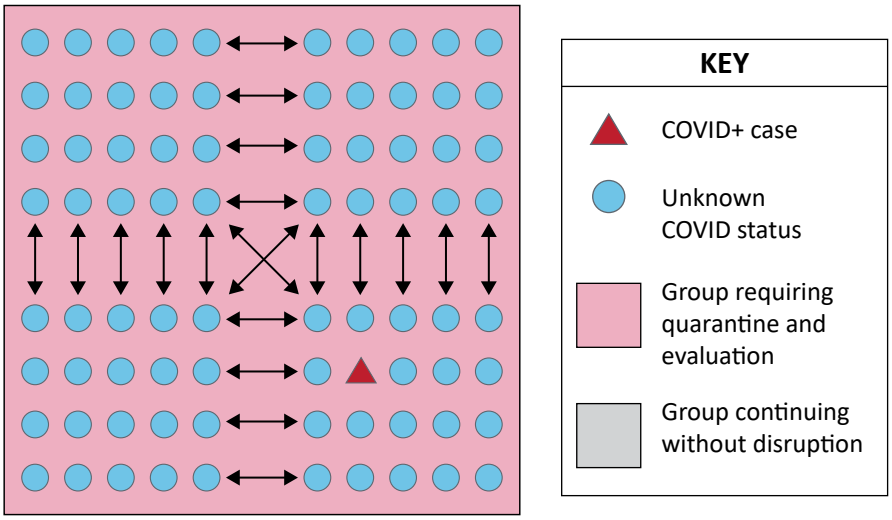
COVID-19 TRANSMISSION MITIGATION TACTICS

Cohorts

LOWER RISK



HIGHER RISK



GUIDANCE REGARDLESS OF PHASE

School Environment and/or Activities

Physical Distance (applies more strongly to middle and high school settings):

- 6-foot between-student spacing reduces disease transmission risk and should be preferred; 3-foot distancing still provides substantial benefits and is acceptable in the context of a comprehensive disease control strategy.
- Teachers and other adult staff should make the greatest effort to adhere to 6-foot distancing, as their risk and disease transmission potential is higher than students.
- Create a seating chart and maintain children in assigned seats throughout the day as possible.
- Consider staggered arrival and pickup times to reduce crowding in entrances and hallways.

Class and Cohort Size:

- Class sizes and cohorting guidance will vary with phase and grade level (see below).
- Cohorting: the practice of keeping the same students and teachers in the same small group at all times during the school day. Ideally, changes in cohorts are timed to align with school semesters or trimesters after lengthy breaks, but even shorter blocks of time, such as two weeks, can be effective. Cohorting helps limit the number of contacts each individual has. As a result, if quarantines or dismissals are needed, they may affect fewer people, resulting in fewer disruptions to in-person learning. Students may be in multiple cohorts (for example, bus ride to school, after-school sports, classroom).
- Cohorts are encouraged to reduce contact with others.
- Cohorts reduce the number of exposed students/staff from a confirmed COVID-19 case and will result in fewer students/staff required to quarantine.
- Special service providers need not be included in the teacher-to-classroom ratios. These providers should minimize contact with non-client students and other adults in classrooms.

GUIDANCE REGARDLESS OF PHASE

School Environment and/or Activities - Continued

Minimize Transmission Risk:

- Use physical barriers as appropriate to decrease risk of viral transmission.
- Refer symptomatic employees and students to a health care professional for evaluation and potential testing, as well as to the CDPHE Symptom Support tool. (Additional Guidance), and report to local public health agencies.[2]
- Identify a dedicated room or space to isolate symptomatic individuals until they can return home or to a health facility, cleaning and disinfecting appropriately between use. Locate isolation space apart from health office functions.
- Regularly clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces and shared objects (Additional Guidance).
- Maximize ventilation and increase circulation of outdoor air, referencing ASHRAE guidance.
- Keep hand sinks stocked with soap and paper towels. Use signage to encourage frequent hand washing.

Confirmed COVID-19 case:

- Prepare to shift to remote learning (2 - 14 days) when school closures or cohort dismissals occur in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case among students or employees.
- CDPHE will provide exposure definitions and outbreak investigation requirements in later July that will be linked here. This will be a statewide standard.

Coordinate with local public health.

- Know your LPHA contact.
- Be prepared to provide information about students and staff who were in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case.

GUIDANCE REGARDLESS OF PHASE

Employees

Masks/Face Coverings/PPE:

- Comply with applicable state and local mask orders, in addition to below.
- Require face coverings over the nose and mouth for all staff, including during in-person instruction (Additional Guidance) unless they cannot medically tolerate a face covering.
- If needed, face coverings may be temporarily removed or transparent alternatives may temporarily be substituted when learning differences interfere with instruction.
- If necessary, the mask may be removed for instruction for the shortest duration possible.
- Even when in a cohort, face coverings over the nose and mouth are required for all staff.
- Adults are required to wear coverings over the nose and mouth when they are with other adults including in faculty lounges.

Health Screenings:

- Employees will undergo home temperature and symptom screening or self-screening.
- Remain home if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or if a family member or other close contact has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is experiencing symptoms.
- Employees unable to complete screening prior to arrival will undergo screening on site. Maximize privacy and minimize exposure to others during onsite screenings.
- Schools may consider daily on site temperature screenings for employees.

Work Environment Options:

- Consider developing staff leave, online learning options, and alternative work duty policies that support employees working from home.
- Comply with legal requirements to provide alternative work assignments for older adults, pregnant people, and those identified as at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Hygiene/Safety:

- Wash hands frequently for 20 seconds with soap and water.
- Train staff on specific health/safety protocols.

GUIDANCE REGARDLESS OF PHASE

Protecting Students/Parents

Masks/Face Coverings/PPE:

- Comply with applicable state and local mask orders, in addition to below.
- Encourage cloth face coverings over the nose and mouth for students up to age 10 years except during outdoor recess and exercise activities.
- Require cloth face coverings over the nose and mouth for students ages 11 years and older, including during in-person instruction unless the student has a health or education reason for not wearing a mask.
- Masks do not need to be work during outdoor recess and exercise activities where appropriate distancing can be maintained.
- Face covering styles with other than head-strap style attachments should be preferred for students 10 and under to increase safety and improve ability of students to remove their own masks
- All masks should be removed during nap times and when younger children can not be directly observed; masks should be designed so students can remove them without assistance.

Health Screenings:

- Establish guidance for parents on temperature checks, home hygiene, and attendance/reporting procedure.
- Students will undergo home temperature and symptom screening or self-screening.
- Remain home if experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or if a family member or other close contact has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is experiencing symptoms.
- Students unable to complete screening prior to arrival will undergo screening on site. Maximize privacy and minimize exposure to others during onsite screenings.
- How to conduct a facility health screening.
- Schools should consider daily temperature screenings.

GUIDANCE REGARDLESS OF PHASE

Protecting Students/Parents - Continued

Populations identified as at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19:

- Encourage parents/guardians of children with special health needs to discuss the risks and benefits of in-person vs. remote schooling with their health care provider.
- Facilitate alternative arrangements (including remote learning and strategies to reduce risk of in-person learning) when appropriate.

Transportation:

- Reduce the risk of transmission by limiting capacity of school buses, having household and classroom units sit together, and establishing more frequent and shorter trips.
- Bus services should follow guidelines developed for public transportation, with the exception that household groups may sit closely together with appropriate distancing between household groups.
- If physical distancing is not feasible on a bus, all students must wear cloth face coverings over the nose and mouth, unless the student has a health reason for not wearing a mask or if a child is unable to wear a mask safely without supervision.
- If physical distancing is feasible, encourage cloth face coverings over the nose and mouth for students up to age 10 years, and require cloth face coverings over the nose and mouth for students age 11 years and older, unless the student has a health reason for not wearing a mask or if a child is unable to wear a mask safely without supervision.

Hygiene:

- Wash hands frequently: 20 seconds with soap and water.

Areas other than classrooms:

- Guidance for other locations may be found here.

STAY AT HOME

High COVID-19 Incidence in the Community

GRADE LEVEL	CLASSROOM GUIDANCE[3]
K - 5th	• Remote learning, except for a limited number of students requiring in-person education due to specific learning needs. • Up to three adults rotate per classroom per day with a strict cohort of students. Maintain 6-foot distance between adults.
6th - 8th	• Remote learning, except for a limited number of students requiring in-person education due to specific learning needs. • Up to two adults rotate per classroom per day with a strict cohort of students. Maintain 6-foot distance between all people.
9th - 12th	• Remote learning, except for a limited number of students requiring in-person education due to specific learning needs. • Since students in grade 9-12 transmit the virus like young adults, limit size to no more than 10 in a cohort including the teacher and students. Maintain 6-foot distance between all people. Rotating teachers should be avoided.
Staff-Only Activities	• Remote or outdoors if possible; groups of 10 or fewer if physical attendance is required.

Cohorting Guidance[4]

Students should remain in their primary classroom with the same cohort of students throughout the week; staff should remain with the same classroom throughout the week.

SAFER AT HOME

Moderate COVID-19 Incidence in the Community

GRADE LEVEL	CLASSROOM GUIDANCE[3]
K - 5th	• Continue remote instruction if best for your community or; • Up to four adults per classroom per day. So, only 4 teachers should rotate into one specific classroom per day. • Students in grades K-5 do not need to meet the 6-foot distance in classrooms or other locations. • Normal class sizes may occur.
6th - 8th	• Continue remote instruction if best for your community or; • Up to three adults per classroom per day. So, only 3 teachers should rotate into one specific classroom per day. • A firm student gathering number is not given because school classroom sizes differ between and among districts. Local schools should determine the appropriate gathering size while working towards 6-foot distance in a classroom. It is understood some adjustments for each school will need to occur.
9th - 12th	• Continue remote instruction if best for your community or; • A firm student gathering number is not given because school classroom sizes differ between and among districts. Schools should determine the appropriate gathering size while working towards 6-foot distance in a classroom. It is understood some adjustments for each school will need to occur.
Staff-Only Activities	• Remote or outdoors if possible; groups of 10 or fewer and outdoor groups of 25 with 6-foot distancing and wearing face coverings over the nose and mouth.

SAFER AT HOME

Moderate COVID-19 Incidence in the Community

Cohorting Guidance[4]

- Students should remain in their primary classroom with the same cohort of students throughout the week to prevent full school closure if a case is identified.
- Cohorts should have staggered recess periods, and movement to specialized classrooms (e.g. science lab) should be coordinated to avoid mixing of cohorts.
- To increase cohort feasibility, consider staggered or alternating in-person schedules (e.g. M-T/W-F, AM/PM, or alternate weeks), block scheduling, or hybrid of in-person and proctored remote learning.
- The same staff may alternate during the day between two "partner cohorts."
- Cohorts may be realigned during the school year to support student educational needs. Longer durations of stable cohorting and changes that coincide with school breaks or dismissals enhance the effect of cohorting.

PROTECT OUR NEIGHBORS

Low COVID-19 Incidence in the Community

GRADE LEVEL	CLASSROOM GUIDANCE[3]
K - 5th	• Students in grades K-5 do not need to meet the 6-foot distance in classrooms or other locations. • Normal class sizes may occur. • A defined group of staff should be assigned to a dedicated cohort, but a set number of staff is not identified for flexibility to assign the amount of staff needed for a dedicated cohort.
6th - 8th	• Normal class sizes with increased cohorting, while observing 6-foot spacing as feasible. • A firm student gathering number is not given because school classroom sizes differ between and among districts. Local schools should determine the appropriate gathering size while working towards 6-foot distance in a classroom. It is understood some adjustments for each school will need to occur. If 6-foot distance is not attainable, maximize spacing while layering other transmission mitigation tactics, such as masks.
9th - 12th	• Normal class sizes with increased cohorting, while observing 6-foot distance as feasible. • A firm student gathering number is not given because school classroom sizes differ between and among districts. Local schools should determine the appropriate gathering size while working towards 6-foot distance in a classroom. It is understood some adjustments for each school will need to occur. If 6-foot distance is not attainable, maximize spacing while layering other transmission mitigation tactics, such as masks.
Staff-Only Activities	• 50% of listed space capacity while maintaining 6-foot distancing.

PROTECT OUR NEIGHBORS

Low COVID-19 Incidence in the Community

Cohorting Guidance[4]

- If strict cohorts cannot occur, some cohorting is better than none. In circumstances where stricter cohorting is not feasible, the greatest practical degree of cohorting should be employed in conjunction with other layered risk reduction strategies.
- Cohorts should have staggered recess periods, and movement times to specialized classrooms (e.g. science lab) should be coordinated to avoid mixing of cohorts.
- To increase cohort feasibility, consider staggered or alternating in-person schedules (e.g. M-T/W-F, AM/PM, or alternate weeks), block scheduling, or hybrid of in-person and proctored remote learning.
- Be prepared to pivot to full-time remote learning for a class or entire school in case of an outbreak.
- Cohorts may be realigned during the school year to support student educational needs. Longer durations of stable cohorting and changes that coincide with school breaks or dismissals enhance the effect of cohorting.

[1] AAP Return to School Guidance https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/; NSW, Australia Study http://ncirs.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/NCIRS%20NSW%20Schools%20COVID_Summary_FINAL%20public_26%20April%202020.pdf, French Alps Contact Tracing Study; https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciaa424/5819060

[2] CDPHE is currently developing a school surveillance system to help track the number of symptomatic students/staff.

[3] Classroom size guidance is contingent on the availability of learning spaces appropriate to accommodate students and teachers with appropriate physical distancing. Schools may consider using alternative learning spaces (e.g. outdoors, gymnasiums, multipurpose rooms, etc) to maximize social distancing.

[4] Cohorts describe stable groups with fixed membership. For a classroom setting, cohorting is achieved by maintaining the same group of students together throughout the day across many weeks. While students may be members of more than one cohort, each additional cohort greatly increases the number of individuals who may be exposed to a case of COVID-19. Cohorting facilitates disease control by minimizing the number of contacts each individual is exposed to. This, in turn, limits the scope of dismissal and closure activities in the event of a detected case of COVID-19 or other disease.

Athletic, extracurricular and cocurricular activities will vary by phase, and will be addressed in separate guidance from CDPHE.

Stay, Safer, and Protect Complete Framework - specific metrics