



August 17, 2021
Client Alert

COVID-19 GUIDANCE AND NEWEST RECOMMENDATIONS

As the new school year quickly approaches, the Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH) and Education (PDE) released updated guidance and resources late last week to align with guidance released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in July 2021.

Key points:

- Physical Distancing: 3 feet, to the greatest extent feasible, with layered protections; 6 feet recommended for those who are not vaccinated.
- Masking: Universal masking recommended for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. Masking mandated on school buses, regardless of vaccination status, per CDC order.
- School meals: Maximize physical distancing as much as possible; no need to limit food service approaches to single use items and packaged meals.
- Cleaning: Cleaning once per day is usually enough. Schools should clean and disinfect within 24 hours if a case was present.
- Reporting Cases/Isolation/Quarantines: Continue to work with DOH or county or municipal health departments to complete the contact tracing process. Schools working with the DOH must report cases for contact tracing and quarantine/isolation orders if necessary. Schools are encouraged to refer to CDC protocols available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/student-becomes-sick-diagnosis-flowchart.html>.
- Excluding Close Contacts: While the isolation period for people with COVID symptoms is at least ten (10) days, schools may choose to follow a fourteen (14) day exclusion period.

Outbreak containment

An outbreak is defined as “2 or more cases among students/staff without other identified epidemiological linkages, with onset within 14 days in a single classroom or core group.” If schools are experiencing an outbreak, they are encouraged to reach out to their local health department for guidance, and, if needed, the DOH will work with schools to preserve safe in-person learning. However, school closures may still occur if deemed necessary.

WWW.BEARDLEGALGROUP.COM

3366 LYNNWOOD DRIVE • PO BOX 1311 • ALTOONA, PENNSYLVANIA 16603-1311 • PHONE 814-943-3304 • FAX 814-943-3430
OFFICES ALSO LOCATED IN JOHNSTOWN, PA

The guidance presents the following closure matrix where the DOH may recommend a maximum 14-day suspension of in-person learning if the following criteria are met:

- 5% of students/staff confirmed cases in 14-day window:
 - Small school (<500 staff & students): 25 case threshold
 - Medium school (500-900 staff & students): 25-45 case threshold
 - Large school (900+ staff & students): 45+ case threshold

OR

- 3 simultaneous classroom and/or core group outbreaks
 - Transmission between 2 or more students or students/staff/teachers without other identified epidemiological links in 3 or more classrooms and/or core groups (i.e. teams, band).

The guidance provides no further explanation regarding the above, so schools are cautioned to consult the DOH, county or municipal health departments when it remains unclear from whom, when, or where the transmission occurred.

However, schools are permitted to consider short-term closures for staffing shortages, student quarantines that become disruptive, or monitoring close cases.

As always, schools should refer to the full CDC guidance to plan for the upcoming school year, as the PDE and DOH will not be releasing separate state guidance or recommendations at this time.

PDE and DOH have likewise announced initiatives relative to testing programs and vaccinations clinics which are described more fully on PDE's What's New webpage:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/Pages/WhatsNew.aspx>

As with all other Client Alerts, these guidelines/recommendations are subject to change on a daily or weekly basis depending on Order from Governor Wolf, the Pennsylvania Department of Education or Pennsylvania Secretary of Health.

While the Beard Legal Group Client Alert is designed to provide information on topics of concern to Pennsylvania Public Schools, it is not legal advice and School Districts should contact their Solicitor, Labor or Special Counsel for advice related to their specific circumstances.