

# KEY PRACTICES FOR REDUCING SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN SCHOOLS



This resource outlines key practices that schools will use to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The Oregon Department of Education in consultation with the Oregon Health Authority are working together to guide schools. And while it is simply unfeasible to eradicate all risk, this resource promotes clear communication aimed at lowering the risk of transmitting COVID-19 among staff, students and families.

## KEY PRACTICES FOR REDUCING SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN SCHOOLS

The mainstays of reducing exposure to the coronavirus and other respiratory pathogens are:



**Physical Distancing** At least six feet with other people.



**Hand Hygiene** Frequent washing with soap and water or using hand sanitizer.



**Cohorts** Conducting all activities in small groups that remain together over time with minimal mixing of groups.



**Protective Equipment** Use of face shields, face coverings, and barriers.



**Isolation & Quarantine** — Isolation separates sick people from people who are not sick. Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.



**Environmental Cleaning & Disinfection** Especially of high touch surfaces.



**Airflow & Ventilation** — Outdoor activities are safer than indoor activities; maximize airflow in closed spaces.

The [Ready Schools Safe Learners](#) guidance provides requirements and recommendations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in schools. These **Key Practices for Reducing Spread of COVID-19 in Schools** provide the foundation for the health and safety of our schools and communities. There have been a number of key practices considered in determining what can and should be required and what is best to mitigate the risks of spreading COVID-19 in the return to school.

## RISK MITIGATION PRACTICES

These are the health and safety practices that will protect students, staff, and communities from COVID-19 and other illnesses. When multiple health and safety practices are used together, there is a better chance of staying safe from COVID-19 and other illnesses. Each of these practices is required and described in the [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#) guidance, with additional recommendations provided.

### PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Staying six feet apart from others is a main way to prevent the spread of COVID-19, because it is an airborne illness. When students and staff are on school sites, there will be noticeable differences in how classrooms and other parts of the school are arranged. The term physical distancing is preferred to social distancing because social interactions remain important and emphasis is on the physical space created between people for safety.

### PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal Protective Equipment, or PPE, includes using face coverings and face shields. Using face coverings or face shields is a main way to stay safe and healthy because COVID-19 spreads through the air. If a person is infected with COVID-19 or another respiratory illness, breathing will spread the illness through the air. When faces are covered, the illness is not able to spread throughout the air and others are kept safe. Face coverings and face shields work together with physical distancing because infected droplets are lessened, and there is more space and airflow between people for the infected droplets to dissipate.



### HAND HYGIENE

Washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol based hand sanitizer is important to prevent COVID-19 from spreading through contact. Keeping clean hands by washing with soap and water for 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60-95% alcohol helps protect the individual because it reduces the risk of contracting COVID-19 from touching a contaminated surface. Hand hygiene also helps keep others safe because it reduces the risk of spreading COVID-19 if a person is infected. Together with enhanced cleaning, hand hygiene can prevent COVID-19 from being transmitted from a surface to the body through the nose or mouth.



## SCREENING

Screening is a way to quickly check for signs of infection. Signs of possible infection include cough, fever or chills, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing. By screening students regularly, possible cases of COVID-19 infection are identified faster. This keeps more students and staff safe. Applying an equity lens to screening is critical to prevent this practice from systematically excluding students or groups of students. Screening does not mean testing for COVID-19. A student might have symptoms identified through screening that are similar to the symptoms of COVID-19 without being infected with COVID-19. It is also possible to spread COVID-19 without showing any symptoms.

## COHORTS

Cohorts help manage risks in the potential spread of COVID-19. In particular, the size of the cohort matters for risk management. Student cohorting not only helps to quickly identify exposed people, it also minimizes disruptions to learning, because only the cohort members would be affected by the exposure. Maintaining small, stable cohorts can decrease the risk of closure to in-person instruction. A smaller cohort size of 24-36 is recommended for public health and safety.

## ISOLATION & QUARANTINE

Isolation is a way to prevent others from becoming infected from a person who may have COVID-19. Screening and isolation together are active ways that schools are able to respond to possible positive cases of COVID-19, and therefore prevent others from getting sick. Staff and students should not assume that a person in isolation has COVID-19. As with screening, the isolation practice is used as a preventative measure when the possibility of infection is present. Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.



## ENHANCED CLEANING & DISINFECTION

It is possible to spread and contract COVID-19 through surfaces. This happens when droplets containing COVID-19 are spread through the air and land on surfaces. Disinfecting surfaces such as desks, railings, and doorknobs frequently with disinfectants will prevent any droplets from being picked up by others who touch the same surface. In classrooms, disinfecting shared objects such as pencil sharpeners and other supplies will help keep students and adults safe. Finding ways to avoid sharing objects will work with enhanced cleaning to keep classrooms and learning spaces disinfected.

## AIRFLOW / VENTILATION

When there is more air available to flow between people, there is a smaller chance of getting sick or of an individual getting someone else sick. Holding classes and activities outside is safer than indoors. Keeping windows open will provide extra ventilation in closed spaces. Especially when physical distancing is difficult to maintain, increasing air circulation into an area will help stop infection from spreading.