

# Berrien County Return to Learn Interim Guidance Brief for 2021-2022 School Year

*Issued July 11, 2021; Last revised August 16, 2021*

## ***Intended Audiences: School Leaders and Administrators***

Whereas in-person learning has been shown to provide the greatest benefit to community youth, and where ensuring this can happen consistently and safely during the upcoming school year has been deemed a priority of public health and education partners.

Through ongoing partnership of public health and education partners, the following guidance is meant to support school districts in planning for a successful return to the classroom this fall and to ensure that COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures are implemented in a way that fosters optimal learning environments while simultaneously ensuring health and safety for the overarching school-district community (students and staff alike) and Berrien County community overall.

This interim guidance is based on current data, trends and knowledge about SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). Guidance may change and evolve as knowledge changes surrounding current and potential variants and availability of vaccination for younger age groups.

### **Monitoring Community Transmission & COVID-19 Activity:**

Local public health will provide ongoing monitoring of community transmission in Berrien County and the surrounding region. This activity will allow the Berrien County Health Department (BCHD) to support school superintendents and administrators in making informed and educated decisions that are best for school operations, students and staff.

BCHD will provide updates and adjust recommendations based on federal and state indicators for transmission paired with local data and context to maintain the appropriate approach to adding and removing prevention and mitigation measures. The BCHD will monitor and make decisions based on the following:

- CDC's predesignated indicators and thresholds for [community transmission of COVID-19](#) (see Table 1, inset below);
- Hospitalizations and overall impact to local healthcare and hospital systems ability to maintain the standard of care;
- Vaccination coverage & rates of Berrien County residents and surrounding region;
- Early detection of cases and ability to interrupt the chain of transmission (e.g. ability to support meaningful case investigation & contact tracing); and
- Vulnerable populations impacted with severe illness, hospitalization & death.

Based on the areas noted above, the Berrien County Health Department will provide weekly updates to school leaders, setting the threshold for transmission that will guide implementation of prevention & mitigation strategies at the district, school building level and in some instances classroom level. Weekly transmission threshold will be posted on the BCHD website on the [COVID-19 Data & Cases](#) page.

**Table 1. CDC Indicators and Thresholds for Community Transmission of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>**

Indicator	Low Transmission Blue	Moderate Transmission Yellow	Substantial Transmission Orange	High Transmission Red
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days <sup>2</sup>	0-9	10-49	50-99	≥100
Percentage of NAATs that are positive during the past 7 days <sup>3</sup>	<5.0%	5.0%-7.9%	8.0%-9.9%	≥10.0%

<sup>1</sup>If the two indicators suggest different levels, the actions corresponding to the higher threshold should be chosen. County-level data on total new cases in the past 7 days and test percent positivity are available on the County View tab in [CDC’s COVID Data Tracker](#).

<sup>2</sup>Total number of new cases per 100,000 persons within the last 7 days is calculated by adding the number of new cases in the county (or other community type) in the last 7 days divided by the population in the county (or other community type) and multiplying by 100,000.

<sup>3</sup>Percentage of positive diagnostic and screening NAATs during the last 7 days is calculated by dividing the number of positive tests in the county (or other administrative level) during the last 7 days by the total number of tests resulted over the last 7 days. Additional information can be found on the [Calculating Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 \(SARS-CoV-2\) Laboratory Test Percent Positivity: CDC Methods and Considerations for Comparisons and Interpretation](#) webpage.

**Local Guidance for Implementation of COVID-19 Prevention Strategies**

The following list are the overarching prevention strategies recommended for prevention of COVID-19 transmission in the school setting:

- Exclusion due to Illness (**Staying home when sick**)
- Promoting Vaccination
- Consistent & Correct Mask Use
- Physical Distancing/ Cohorting
- Screening Testing
- Ventilation
- Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette
- Contact tracing paired with isolation & quarantine
- Cleaning & Disinfecting

BCHD advises schools to implement these prevention strategies in a layered and measured approach. Layering multiple strategies provides increased safety and protection for staff and students and by being able to increase prevention strategies based on community transmission category allows schools to remain agile and poised to maintain a safe and healthy environment in the event that community transmission increases or a new variant strain emerges that poses greater risk or causes more severe illness among children. The following table provides guidance and recommendations on how a school may consider implementing prevention strategies.

COVID-19 Prevention Strategies	Prevention & Mitigation Levels for COVID-19			
	Level 1 (Low Transmission)	Level 2 (Low/Moderate Transmission)	Level 3 (Substantial/High Transmission)	Level 4 (High+ Transmission)
<b>1) Promote Vaccination for eligible staff &amp; students</b>	x	x	x	x
<b>Face Mask*</b>				
2a) Unvaccinated students and staff wear face masks indoors	x	x	x	x
2b) All students and staff wear face masks indoors			x	x
<b>3) Physical distancing where possible</b>		x	x	x
3a) Cohorting loosely (e.g. meals in cafeteria, etc...)		x		
3b) Cohorting strictly (e.g. meals in classrooms, etc...)			x	x
<b>4) Screening, Testing, and Contact Tracing</b>				
4a) Exclude students and staff if sick	x	x	x	x
4b) Encourage symptomatic students and staff or those exposed to a positive person to be tested for COVID-19	x	x	x	x
4c) Conduct screening testing of students				x
4d) Implement contact tracing and quarantine in collaboration with BCHD	x	x	x	x
<b>5) Maintaining Healthy Environments</b>				
5a) Promote handwashing and cough/sneeze hygiene	x	x	x	x
5b) Routine cleaning to focus primarily on high touch surfaces		x	x	x
5b) Increase in thoroughness & frequency of cleaning			x	x
5c) Avoid crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities			x	x

\***Face Masks** must be worn during school supported transportation. CDC order applies to all public transportation inclusive of conveyance by school bus; face masks must be worn by all buses operated by public and private school systems. Additionally, schools may choose universal masking for threshold(s) that note unvaccinated if needed to support appropriate implementation and compliance.

### Example Implementation of Above Guidance & Recommendations for School Activities & Functions

The following is for example purposes only, but may provide ideas for implementation, clarity for recommended activities at corresponding community transmission thresholds, and guidance for application to unique school district operations.

School districts should consider the make-up of their personnel and student bodies when making final decisions for implementation. Consideration should be given to current vaccination status, vulnerability of populations served, abilities to consistently support and integrate prevention strategies.

School Activities/Functions	Prevention & Mitigation Levels for COVID-19			
	Level 1 Low Transmission	Level 2 Low/Moderate Transmission	Level 3 Substantial/High Transmission	Level 4 High+ Transmission
Curriculum Instruction Format	In-person Instruction Supported as Primary	In-person Instruction Supported as Primary	In-person Instruction Supported; may encompass remote instruction in isolated classrooms and/or buildings	Impact to whole buildings/district may be experienced; may transition to remote instruction for a classroom, building or district as need determines. Continue to prioritize in-person as able with guidance from public health.
Face Masks	Recommended for unvaccinated and/or immunocompromised	Recommended for unvaccinated and/or immunocompromised	Face masks strongly recommended for all students, staff & guests**	Face masks strongly recommended for all students, staff & guests**
Social Distancing & Cohorting	Small group activities take place, normal classroom & recess activities occur, etc...	Small group activities take place, normal classroom & recess activities occur, etc...  Consider limiting crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities	Classroom & learning topic cohorts integrated into operations; may limit group activities to cohorts  Avoid crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities	Classroom & learning topic cohorts integrated into operations; may limit/pause group activities  Avoid crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities

			Increased Physical Distancing	Increased Physical Distancing
Cleaning & Disinfecting	Districts adhere to normal cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety	Districts adhere to normal cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety.  Additional cleaning for high-touch surfaces implemented	Districts implement increased cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety (increased thoroughness, frequency, high touch surfaces)	Districts implement increased cleaning & disinfecting protocols for maintaining health and safety (increased thoroughness, frequency, high touch surfaces)
Food Service	Normal Food Service Operations	Normal Food Service Operations	Normal Food Service Operations for 12+ Elementary moves to meals in classroom or cohorts	Meals happen in cohorts/classrooms as feasible
Transportation	Normal transportation operations  *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements	Normal transportation operations  *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements	Normal transportation operations  Increased health & safety protocols implemented (cleaning, pick-up rotations, ventilation, etc...)  *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements	Normal transportation operations  Increased health & safety protocols implemented (cleaning, pick-up rotations, ventilation, etc...)  *adhere to CDC order for face mask requirements
Visitors & Guests	Visitors & guests allowed in buildings.  Recommended completion of health screening upon entry and masking for	Visitors & guests allowed in buildings.  Recommended completion of health screening upon entry and masking for	May limit visitors & guests to essential for student health, safety & wellness  Required completion of health screening upon	Limit visitors & guests to essential for student health, safety & wellness; move to virtual connections where able

	unvaccinated while indoors	unvaccinated while indoors	entry and masking while indoors	Required completion of health screening upon entry and masking while indoors
Athletics	Practices & competitions permitted. Health screening and hygiene in place	Practices & competitions permitted; prioritize outdoor activities as much as possible Health screening and hygiene in place	Competitions may be paused; practices focus on skills building with increased social distancing required  Health screening and hygiene in place  Screening testing considered to support ongoing play	Competitions & practices may be paused.  Health screening and hygiene in place  Screening testing considered to support practices if recommended for continuation.
Extra-Curricular Activities	Extracurricular activities proceed as scheduled  (Band/Choir/Drama operate normally)	Some extracurricular activity suspension and/or modifications could be expected  (Consider incorporating face coverings for Band/Choir/Drama)	Extracurricular activities may be suspended; individual based activities that allow for appropriate social distancing may continue	Extracurricular activities may be suspended
Meetings & Conferences	School meetings & conference attendance takes place	School meetings & conference attendance takes place  Increased social distancing in meeting space considered	Limit meetings in-person, increased social distancing.  Consider suspending travel for conferences/meetings out of County (based on regional transmission)	In-person meetings/conferences may be suspended. Virtual platforms prioritized.
Hand Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette	Hand washing & proper cough/sneeze etiquette is prioritized. Reminder and education provided to all students and staff, with extra emphasis on education for prek-5 at year beginning. Hand washing to be			

	supported throughout day, with focus on pre and post meal periods, recess and restroom use. Hand sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol content will be available in classrooms and other student/staff locations (main office, cafeterias, entrances...)
Student & Staff Health Screening	<p>Recommend all staff and students complete daily health screenings. <b>Do NOT report to school if sick.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Students:</i> parents/guardians complete daily student wellness check prior to sending student to school. Students should adhere to school policy for reporting illness &amp; return to school post-illness</li> <li>✓ <i>Staff:</i> conduct daily wellness self-check prior to reporting to work; consider using Michigan’s electronic assessment tool: <a href="https://misymptomapp.state.mi.us/">https://misymptomapp.state.mi.us/</a></li> </ul>
Contact Tracing, Isolation & Quarantine	<p>Work with BCHD &amp; RESA to support robust case investigation &amp; contact tracing. Provide educational support for students and families who are impacted by isolation and quarantine. Isolation &amp; quarantine will adhere to local public health requirements and operating procedures. Close contact identification will be supported by the school for classroom and athletic based close contact identification.</p> <p>Notes. Close contact exclusion will be determined by current school operations and policies currently in place for masking and social distancing. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No masking required. Close contacts within 6 ft of positive individual will be quarantined for 10 days from last date of contact. Fully vaccinated individuals do not quarantine unless symptomatic</li> <li>✓ Face masks required. Close contacts within 3 ft of positive individual will be quarantined for 10 days from last date of contact. Individuals 3 to 6 ft may continue to attend school as long as they do not have any symptoms. Fully vaccinated individuals do not quarantine unless symptomatic.</li> </ul>
Vaccinations	Districts will promote and encourage all eligible staff, students & families to be vaccinated. Will support access through provision of information (flyers, FAQs, etc...) to school personnel and families in partnership with BCHD. Will consider hosting onsite vaccination clinics as feasible.

\*\*School Administrators & Leaders are encouraged to implement and support universal masking policies where possible; additionally, should local community data and context dictate the Local Health Officer and the Berrien County Health Department may require masking by public health order to decrease school and community transmission of COVID-19 and to support prioritization of in-person learning.

**Additional Guidance, Resources & Reference Materials:**

Recommendations and prevention categories and strategies identified previously correspond and are based upon the following MDHSS & CDC guidance documents.

MDHHS issued a brief guidance document on June 25, 2021. [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/COVID-19\\_Guidance\\_for\\_Operating\\_Schools\\_Safely\\_728838\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/COVID-19_Guidance_for_Operating_Schools_Safely_728838_7.pdf)

CDC guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Kindergarten (K) -12 Schools. Updated July 9, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

MMWR. Disparities in Learning Mode Access Among K-12 Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Race/Ethnicity, Geography, and Grade Level. Issued June 29, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7026e2.htm>

Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs – Updated July 9, 2021. [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission\\_k\\_12\\_schools.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fmore%2Fscience-and-research%2Ftransmission\\_k\\_12\\_schools.html#print](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fmore%2Fscience-and-research%2Ftransmission_k_12_schools.html#print)