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DPHSS Guidance Memorandum 2021-09 (Revision 1)

RE: Interim DPHSS Guidance Memo 2021-09 (Revision 1) Re: Additional Guidance Relative to Social Distancing for In-Class Operations for K-12 Schools

The purpose of this Guidance is to provide further clarification for schools adopting the two and a half (2.5) feet to three (3) feet physical distancing for in-class operations for K-12 Schools (Schools). In addition, layered mitigation strategies to help prevent and control COVID-19 transmission in schools will be outlined in this Guidance. Schools are encouraged to post signs at the entrance and throughout the facility that promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The following Guidance shall be adhered to:

A. Universal and Correct Use of Masks

1. Core principle for masks:
 - a. Require consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks that must cover both the nose and mouth at the same time with proper filtration by all students, visitors, teachers, and staff to prevent COVID-19 transmission through respiratory droplets.
 - b. Masks should be worn at all times, by all people in school facilities, with certain exceptions for certain people, or for certain settings or activities, such as while eating or drinking.
 - c. Masks should be required in all classroom and non-classroom settings, including hallways, school offices, restrooms, gyms, auditoriums, etc.
2. Mask policies for all students, visitors, teachers, and staff set the expectation that people will use masks throughout the school.
3. Face shields may be used in addition to a face mask. Face shields should never be worn in lieu of a face mask, subject to applicable CDC Guidelines for the appropriate population.
 - a. If individuals choose to wear a face shield, ensure they fit properly and can be cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's directions.
4. School staff are to provide a face mask to any student who does not have one or who arrives to the school without one.
5. The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are tightly woven, such as cotton and cotton blends, breathable, and have two or three fabric layers.
6. Masks with exhalation valves or vents, those that use loosely woven fabrics, and those that do not fit properly are prohibited.

7. Schools will adopt U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for face coverings for certain populations and situations, including those with certain medical conditions, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or asthma (e.g., “Who Should Not Wear a Cloth Face Covering” and “Feasibility and Adaptations”). The wearing of face shields may be one alternative for these individuals, as provided in applicable CDC guidelines.
 - a. Most students, including those with disabilities, can tolerate and safely wear a mask. However, a narrow subset of students with disabilities might not be able to wear a mask or cannot safely wear a mask.
 - b. Those who cannot safely wear a mask—for example, a person with a disability who, for reasons related to the disability, would be physically unable to remove a mask without assistance if breathing becomes obstructed—should not be required to wear one.
 - c. For the remaining portion of the subset, Schools should make individualized determinations as required by Federal disability laws in order to determine if an exception to the mask requirement is necessary and appropriate for a particular student.
 - d. If a child with a disability cannot wear a mask, maintain physical distance, or adhere to other public health requirements, the student is still entitled to an appropriate education, which in some circumstances may need to be provided virtually.
8. If visitors are permitted in Schools, they are required to wear masks at all times and should maintain a minimum of 6 feet physical distance from others.
9. Schools should encourage modeling of correct and consistent mask use by school leaders, local leaders, and others respected in the community.

B. Physical Distancing

1. Core principle for physical distancing:
 - a. Schools, where not everyone is fully vaccinated, should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their structures, but should not exclude students from in-person learning in order to keep a minimum distance requirement.
2. Between students in classrooms:
 - a. Students should be at least three (3) feet apart to the greatest extent possible.
 - b. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, it is important to layer other multiple mitigation strategies, such as indoor masking, screening testing, grouping students such that they stay together for all courses and activities (e.g., lunch, recess) and avoid interacting with other groups, also referred to as “*cohorting*,” improved ventilation, handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes, staying home when sick with symptoms of infectious illness including COVID-19, and regular cleaning and disinfecting to help reduce transmission risk.
3. Maximize distance, to the greatest extent possible, in these settings:
 - a. Between adults (teachers and staff), and between adults and students, within the school building, especially if not fully vaccinated.
 - b. When masks cannot be worn, such as when eating.
 - c. During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band, or sports and exercise. Move these activities outdoors or to large, well-ventilated space, if possible.
 - d. In common areas such as school lobbies or auditorium.

4. Use cohorting, and maintain 6 feet of distance between cohorts where possible. Limit contact between cohorts. In areas of substantial and high levels of community transmission, Schools that use less than 6 feet between students in classrooms, cohorting is recommended, with at least 6 feet maintained between cohorts. To limit contact between cohorts, Schools may adjust their schedules in order to accommodate physical distancing requirements and facilitate contact tracing.
5. Remove nonessential furniture and make other changes to classroom layouts to maximize distance between students.
6. Face desks in the same direction, where possible.
7. Eliminate or decrease nonessential in-person interactions among teachers and staff during meetings, lunches, and other situations that could lead to adult-to-adult transmission.
8. Visitors:
 - a. Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as much as possible.
 - b. Require all visitors to wear masks and maintain six (6) feet distance from others.

C. Cleaning and Disinfection

1. All Schools must:
 - a. Conduct daily cleaning and disinfection of facilities.
 - b. Clean and disinfect surfaces in the classroom or workspace of a sick student or employee.
 - c. Focus on high touch areas (e.g., door handles, tables, counters, desktops, keyboards, toilets, telephones, etc.).
 - d. Use a checklist (e.g., date, time, and name of individual) to document thorough cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces, equipment, and common areas of the facility.
 - e. Provide and maintain adequate materials and supplies to help prevent transmission, such as well-stocked handwashing stations.
 - f. Ensure that toilet facilities and handwashing sinks are thoroughly and frequently cleaned and disinfected.
 - g. Use commercial-grade, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered household disinfectant. If unavailable, a home-made disinfectant may be used by mixing 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) of bleach (5% - 6% hypochlorite concentration) per 1 gallon of water, or 4 teaspoons of bleach per quart of water.

D. Ventilation

1. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, such as by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk (e.g., allowing pollens in or exacerbating asthma symptoms) to individuals occupying the facility.
2. Consider using portable high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan or similar filtration systems to enhance air cleaning.
3. Take steps to minimize air from blowing from one person directly to another individual if fans and other mechanical ventilation systems are used.

E. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

1. School building occupants should practice handwashing and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) to keep from getting and spreading infectious illnesses (e.g., COVID-19). Schools should monitor and reinforce these behaviors and provide adequate handwashing supplies.
2. School staff should teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
3. Remind everyone in the school facility to wash hands frequently and assist young children with handwashing.
4. If handwashing is not possible, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (for teachers, staff, and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer). Hand sanitizers should be stored up, away, and out of sight of young children and should be used only with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age.

F. Food Service and School Meals

1. In the event that the cafeteria space is insufficient to maintain a minimum of 6 feet physical distance between cohorts, student meals should be delivered and consumed in the classrooms or use additional spaces outside of the cafeteria for mealtime seating such as the gymnasium or outdoor seating, but ensuring that 6 feet physical distance is maintained in all areas between cohorts. Individuals not fully vaccinated must remain no less than 6 feet physical distance while actively eating and drinking from others.
2. Implement 6 feet physical distance when moving through the food service line and while eating (especially indoors).
3. Schools are not limited to utilizing single use items and packaged meals given the very low risk of transmission from surfaces and shared objects.
4. Frequently clean high touch surfaces. Surfaces that come in contact with food should be washed, rinsed, and sanitized before and after meals.
5. Promote hand washing before, after, and during shifts, before and after eating, after using the toilet, and after handling garbage, dirty dishes, or removing gloves.
6. Improve ventilation in food preparation, service, and seating areas.

G. Sports and Extracurricular Activities

1. Mask Requirements:
 - a. Athletes must wear a face mask that covers the nose and mouth when not actively participating in an athletic activity.
 - b. Coaches, officials, and spectators are all required to wear a face mask.
 - c. All persons should avoid touching their masks once they are on their faces.
 - d. If unable to wear a mask, consider conducting the activity in a location with greater ventilation and air exchange, outdoors versus indoors, and where it is possible to maintain physical distance from others.
 - e. If mask gets wet, the wearer should replace it with a new face mask.
 - f. Unless indicated in Section A.7, the use of a face shield or goggle as a substitute for a face mask is prohibited; however, the items may be worn for eye protection with the face mask.
2. Physical Distance Requirements:
 - a. Athletes must maintain 6 feet of separation from others when not on the field of play or when engaged in play/activity, whenever possible.
 - b. Coaches, officials, and spectators must maintain physical distance to the greatest extent possible.

- c. Athletes and coaches are to avoid high fives, handshakes, fist bumps, or hugs.
- d. Provide physical guides, such as tape in the dugouts, benches, restrooms, concession areas, or other shared or athlete staging areas, and signage, to ensure that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart.
- e. Post signs at the entrance and throughout the facility that promote behaviors, which prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 that must be communicated through images and pictures for coaches, athletes, officials, spectators, and other persons to observe.

H. Screening Testing

1. Screening testing is a prevention strategy that will identify persons who are infected but without symptoms. It will also lead to early detection and intervention of COVID-19 cases.
2. DPHSS recommends screening testing for students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated to control, mitigate, and prevent the spread of COVID-19.
3. Screening testing will be used in providing additional protection for Schools unable to meet the minimum social distancing requirement.
4. Schools are encouraged to test 25% of their students every quarter and 100% of the students by the end of the school year.
5. Students, teachers, and staff identified during testing as positive for COVID-19 will be reported to DPHSS.
6. The school contact tracing team will support DPHSS in case investigations.
7. DPHSS will provide guidance to the Schools on mitigation strategies as a result of positive COVID-19 cases.

I. Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested

1. If you are sick, you should:
 - a. Stay home, except to seek medical care. Call ahead before visiting the clinic/doctor.
 - b. Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 including fever, cough, and shortness of breath, fatigue, body aches, headaches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion, nausea and/or diarrhea.
 - c. Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19. While waiting for test results, you should stay away from others, including staying apart from those living in your household.
 - d. Look for emergency warning signs for COVID-19 and seek emergency medical care immediately or call 911 if you are experiencing any of the following warning signs of COVID-19:
 - i. Trouble breathing;
 - ii. Persistent pain or pressure in the chest;
 - iii. New confusion;
 - iv. Inability to wake or stay awake; or,
 - v. Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.
2. If a student or employee is identified in the school facility with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, the following steps should be taken:
 - a. The K-12 parent(s)/legal guardian(s) should be informed, the student isolated, and picked up by parent(s)/legal guardian(s) within the hour. Individual should be advised to seek medical evaluation as appropriate and notify the school of test result if tested for COVID-19.

- b. Staff should go home and be advised to seek medical evaluation as appropriate, and notify the school of their test result if tested for COVID-19.

J. Testing and Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

1. A student or employee who is diagnosed with a probable or laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19:
 - a. The individual shall inform the school immediately and stay home.
 - b. The student/legal guardian or employee will be contacted by DPHSS to conduct case investigation.
 - c. The affected area of the School must be cleaned and disinfected.
 - d. Schools shall follow DPHSS guidance and initiate the gathering of important information such as possible contacts. Information will be shared with DPHSS. All activities and information collected by a K-12 school shall be limited to the school setting and be consistent with applicable federal, state, tribal, local, and territorial privacy, health/medical, and workplace laws and regulations.
 - e. Students or employees who are identified to be close contacts by DPHSS case investigators will be directed to be tested for COVID-19 as appropriate and shall notify the school of test result if tested.
 - f. Students or employees who are not identified as close contacts through case investigation can go to school or work.
 - g. The School will not disclose the name of the student or employee who tested positive to the other students or employees unless permission has been given, preferably in writing. All personnel involved in case investigation and contact tracing activities with access to confidential information should sign a confidentiality statement acknowledging the legal requirements not to disclose COVID-19 information.
 - h. Employees will be placed on leave according to the School's leave policy if identified as close contacts.
 - i. If the student or employee was **symptomatic**, they can go back to school or work after:
 - i. 10 days since symptoms first appeared; and,
 - ii. 24 hours with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications); and,
 - iii. Other symptoms have improved.
 - j. If the student or employee was **asymptomatic**, they can go back to school or work after 10 days after the date of their first positive test for COVID-19.
 - k. Requiring a negative COVID-19 test prior to returning to work or school is not recommended. Instead, Schools should follow the time- and symptom-based approach described above in determining when individuals can return to work or school following COVID-19 diagnosis. If the student or employee was monitored by DPHSS, they will be issued a clearance letter once they are cleared to go back to school or work.
2. If a student or employee is diagnosed with probable or laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 through the K-12 school clinic or health center, the following steps should be taken:
 - a. Inform the individual of result; if the individual is a minor, inform the parent(s)/legal guardian(s).
 - b. Inform the parent(s)/ legal guardian(s) that DPHSS will be following up with them.

3. A student or employee who is in close contact with someone outside the school who tested positive with COVID-19 must inform the school and must quarantine for the duration in accordance with DPHSS Guidance Memorandum 2021-16 and not report to the school or work.

K. Transportation

1. Schools in collaboration with the Department of Public Works, or other transportation providers, must adhere to the following:
 - a. A plan for seating based on maximum capacity that accommodates the capacity limitations of the school buses.
 - b. Ensure physical distance between students and personnel on school buses, when possible.
 - i. Staggered scheduling: Stagger school arrival and drop-off times or locations by cohort, or put in place other protocols to limit contact between cohorts, as well as direct contact with parents.
 - c. Seat students from the rear of the bus forward to prevent students from walking past each other. To further prevent students from walking past one another, afternoon runs should be boarded based on the order in which students will be dropped off. Students who get off first should board last and sit in the front of the school bus.
 - d. Assign seats to students. Members of the same household may sit next to each other.
 - e. Open windows to improve ventilation when it does not create a safety hazard.
 - f. School buses must be cleaned and disinfected prior to picking up students and upon completion of each route.
 - i. Use a checklist (e.g., date, time, route, and name of individual) to document thorough cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces and equipment on the school bus.
 - ii. Use commercial-grade, EPA registered household disinfectant. If unavailable, a home-made disinfectant may be used by mixing 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) of bleach (5% - 6% hypochlorite concentration) per 1 gallon of water, or 4 teaspoons of bleach per quart of water.
 - g. Face masks and hand sanitizers must be available on the school buses.
 - h. Face masks must be worn on school buses at all times, unless exempted from CDC guidance for use of face masks.

L. Promoting COVID-19 Vaccination Among Eligible Individuals in the Schools

1. Core principles:
 - a. Increasing COVID-19 vaccination rates leads to fewer COVID-19 illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.
 - b. More individuals will get vaccinated when they have strong confidence in the COVID-19 vaccine within their communities.
2. Schools should encourage their eligible students, teachers, coaches, advisors, volunteers, and staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and prevent interruptions to in-person learning and participation in sports and extracurricular activities.
3. COVID-19 vaccine information should be shared to promote vaccine trust and confidence among their eligible students, teachers, and staff.

- a. Consider using current/former students, student leaders, local leaders, and others respected in the community as messengers for promoting COVID-19 vaccination within the Schools.
 - b. Ask students, teachers, and staff to promote vaccination efforts within their social groups and/or within their communities.
4. Schools should support policies that promote convenience and access to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

All In-Class Operating Plans for Schools must be emailed to dphss-deh@dphss.guam.gov. If plans have previously been submitted, such plans must be resubmitted in accordance with the minimum requirements set forth in this DPHSS Guidance Memorandum.

For additional questions, please contact the Division of Environmental Health at (671) 300-9579; 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.


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