

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the closure of K–12 schools and the implementation of distance learning. The reopening of such schools requires design and operational changes in order to address the many and lingering health concerns that were raised by the pandemic. This checklist will help a school’s administration establish procedures that are needed to effectively and safely reopen the school, as well as protect the health of students, faculty, and staff on an ongoing basis



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The Decision to Reopen

The first step to take in the reopening process is to designate a person or team to oversee the design and execution of the reopening plan.

As a baseline, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance recommends being able to answer affirmatively to the following questions before reopening your school:

- Will reopening be consistent with applicable state and local orders?
- Is the school ready to protect children and employees at higher risk for severe illness?
- Are you able to screen students and employees upon arrival for symptoms and history of exposure?
- Are recommended safety actions in place, including healthy hygiene practices, cleaning and disinfection, and social distancing?
- Is ongoing monitoring in place to help ensure infected students and employees are not present at the school?
- Is the school able to regularly communicate and monitor developments with local authorities, employees, and families regarding cases, exposure, and updates to policies and practices?

This checklist will help schools evaluate many of the considerations that should be taken into account when reopening the school. The actions necessary to reopen will be unique to each school. The checklist suggests numerous procedures (as well as alternative procedures) to allow the administration to choose the course of action that best matches the physical building and the needs and capabilities of students, faculty, and staff. Each school should use risk assessment techniques to determine what precautions to implement to keep its students and staff safe and healthy.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Before bringing students and staff back into the school, you will want to make sure the facility has been adequately cleaned and disinfected and that plans are in place to continue the cleaning and disinfecting activities at regular and scheduled intervals.

- Follow all applicable state and local orders and directives related to cleaning and disinfecting.
- Determine what needs to be cleaned, and identify all frequently touched surfaces and objects.

Before the School Opens:

- Remove unnecessary objects and furniture from the school to reduce frequent handling and touching.
- Clean all visibly dirty surfaces with soap and water before disinfecting them.
- Disinfect all surfaces and objects that will be frequently touched.
- Develop a plan for ongoing cleaning and disinfecting after the school reopens. Be sure the plan:
 - Identifies who is responsible for scheduled cleanings.
 - Addresses whether teachers and students will participate in cleaning frequently touched surfaces in their classroom throughout the day.
 - Describes what surfaces and objects will be cleaned with soap and water.

- Describes what surfaces will be disinfected. Examples include tables, doorknobs, light switches, keyboards, touch screens, cafeteria tables, handles, desks, phones, faucets and sinks, and toilets.
- Describes how porous material such as carpet or material in seating areas will be cleaned or disinfected. (Consider removing these materials in high-traffic areas.)
- Describes the frequency of cleanings. Frequently touched surfaces and common areas should be cleaned at least daily. However, more frequent cleanings of certain areas may be necessary throughout the day. Other surfaces should be cleaned routinely based on the level of contact.
- Ensures that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved disinfectants for COVID-19 are being used.
- Includes procedures for monitoring to ensure proper cleaning is taking place as required.

After the School Reopens:

- Adhere to the plan you developed for ongoing cleaning and disinfecting.
- Develop a protocol for cleaning and disinfecting your school in accordance with CDC guidelines should someone in the school become infected with COVID-19.
- Maintain a consistent supply of appropriate and essential cleaners, disinfectants, wipes, spray bottles, paper towels, hand sanitizers, no-touch trash cans, and cleaning tools to keep surfaces clean and virus-free.
- Maintain appropriate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) needed for cleaning and disinfecting.
- Ensure the people cleaning and disinfecting:
 - Are equipped with appropriate PPE, including gloves and gowns
 - Have adequate ventilation
 - Have read and are following the manufacturer's instructions, product labels, and safety data sheets (SDSs) for the cleaners being used
 - Have been appropriately trained on the hazards of the products being used and how to use any necessary PPE

Facility Systems

If your school has been unoccupied for an extended period of time, you will want to confirm that building and critical safety systems and equipment are functioning properly, that testing and/or inspections have been conducted, and that necessary repairs or equipment part replacements have been made.

The following systems and equipment must be evaluated and determined to be functioning properly:

- Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Be sure that filters in ventilation systems have been replaced or cleaned.
- Sprinkler systems.
- Alarms.
- Security systems.
- Fire extinguishers.
- Drinking water systems.
- Hand-washing stations.
- Laboratory safety equipment (e.g., eyewash stations).

Ventilation

CDC guidelines and experts recommend that ventilation be increased in buildings as much as possible, as good ventilation can lower the risk of infection. Consider taking these steps to improve ventilation in your building:

- Utilize natural ventilation by opening windows if possible and safe to do so and when environmental conditions and building requirements allow. (If windows are open, students and staff should dress appropriately.)
- Conduct classes outside when possible.
- Increase the percentage of outdoor air in your HVAC system.
- Increase total airflow supply to occupied spaces.
- Inspect filter housing and racks to ensure appropriate filter fit, and check for ways to minimize filter bypass.
- Run the building ventilation system even during unoccupied times to maximize dilution ventilation.
- Use portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to help enhance air cleaning, especially in higher-risk areas.
- Ensure exhaust fans in restroom facilities are functional and operating at full capacity when the building is occupied.

Social Distancing

As students and staff return to the school, each facility will need to take actions to ensure the students and staff can maintain proper social distancing (i.e., maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet between individuals). This will involve administrative actions to determine which students and employees or groups of students and employees return to the facility, as effective social distancing could necessitate smaller class sizes, split schedules, or staggered attendance of certain classes/grades. Consider establishing a phased reopening with reduced hours or certain classes or grades to allow for monitoring how social distancing procedures can be enacted. Social distancing will also involve physical changes to the facility to avoid having students and employees in close proximity to one another.

- Follow all applicable state and local orders and directives related to social distancing.
- Determine what employees and students to bring back to the school while still being able to maintain proper social distancing and taking into account requests not to return, as well as students and employees who may be in a high-risk group or live with someone in a high-risk group.
- Determine what administrative actions can be taken to honor the requests of those who wish not to or cannot for health reasons return to the school and to minimize the number of people on-site at the same time. Options include:
 - Continue to allow distance learning for children who are ill or at higher risk for severe illness, if possible.
 - Stagger arrival times of students and/or attendance of certain classes or grades.
 - Stagger times of breaks, recess, and lunch.
 - Implement alternate work schedules for staff, and continue to allow remote working if possible.
- Increase the distance between students/teachers/employees for proper social distancing (i.e., at least 6 feet). Options include:
 - Classrooms
 - Modify the layout of the classroom by removing desks so they are separated by 6 feet, *or* only allow desks that are 6 feet apart to be used.
 - Install partitions or other physical barriers on communal worktables.
 - Implement policies to limit or eliminate the sharing of materials that are traditionally shared, such as writing materials, art and science supplies, floor mats, and other materials, *or* give each student his or her own materials.
 - Meeting/conference rooms and other common areas
 - Conduct employee/staff meetings virtually via audio or videoconference.
 - Post signs designating the maximum capacity of the room.

- Remove/rearrange furniture to reinforce the maximum capacity and social distancing.
- Break rooms and cafeterias
 - Close break rooms and cafeterias, and have students/staff eat at their desk or workspace.
 - Eat outside if conditions allow.
 - Redesign cafeteria seating, such as sitting at every other seat.
 - Equip cafeteria tables with plastic dividers.
 - Stagger lunchtimes so social distancing can be maintained.
- Control the movement of large numbers of individuals.
 - Limit hallways and stairways to one-way traffic flow, and indicate the correct direction by signs and tape.
 - When a class period is over, have teachers move to their next class of students rather than having students move to a new classroom.
 - Stagger arrival and departure times of students.
 - Discourage crowding and gathering when students have free time and when entering or leaving school.
 - When students are required to stand in line or are waiting for their bus, indicate by tape on the floor as to where they should stand.
- Communicate policies and actions being taken to implement proper social distancing to students and employees electronically and by using visual cues and/or signs as reminders throughout the school building.

Hygiene

Proper hygiene is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19. All employees will be expected to follow appropriate personal hygiene protocols in the school.

- Follow all applicable state and local orders and directives, as well as CDC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidance, related to respirators, masks, face coverings, and other PPE.
- Implement a PPE and face covering policy, in accordance with applicable state and local orders and directives, as well as CDC and OSHA guidance and regulations, that outlines who must wear PPE and/or face coverings, the types of PPE and/or face coverings required, and what training is necessary.
- Ensure an adequate number of hand-washing/sanitizing stations exist throughout the school.
- Consider requiring staff and students to wash or sanitize their hands before entering and exiting the school and before each class.
- Create a schedule for frequent hand hygiene, especially for young children.
- Post signs and information throughout the facility emphasizing good hygiene—specifically, proper hand-washing and coughing/sneezing etiquette.
- Make available to students and employees throughout the school adequate supplies of the following:
 - Hand soap
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Sanitizing wipes
 - Paper products (i.e., paper towels, tissues, etc.)
 - Face coverings and masks
 - Applicable PPE (e.g., gloves, respirators, masks, face shields, etc.)
 - No-touch trash cans
- Encourage/require teachers and possibly students to clean and disinfect their desks and frequently touched materials on a regular basis.

Monitoring Employees

Monitoring students and employees to ensure they are healthy is critical to preventing the spread of the virus and protecting the health of all students, employees, and their families.

- Develop and implement a policy to monitor/screen students and employees for signs and symptoms of COVID-19. For example, consider checking the body temperature of all students and employees daily before they enter the building. Consider enacting the same monitoring procedures for visitors to your school.
- Monitor student and employee absences, and have flexible leave policies and practices.
- Establish procedures for isolating a sick student or employee or one showing symptoms of COVID-19 after the person arrives at school.
- Establish a policy that requires or encourages sick students and employees to stay home.
- Establish criteria, in accordance with CDC guidelines, for sick students and employees to return to the school.
- Consult with the local health authorities if there are cases at the school or an increase in cases in the local area.
- Ensure student or staff members who have been in contact with a COVID-19 case to stay home for 14 days.
- Inform parents about the measures the school has in place, and ask for cooperation to report any cases of COVID-19 that occur in the household.
- Waive the requirement for a doctor's note to excuse absences when there is a community transmission of COVID-19.
- Create a checklist for parents, students, and staff to decide whether a student or staff member can go to school, taking into account the local health department standards for COVID-19. The checklist could include:
 - Underlying medical conditions and vulnerabilities, to protect the student or staff member
 - Recent illness or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19
 - Special circumstances in the home environment, to tailor support as needed
 - Special considerations regarding school transport as needed

School Bus Transportation

Because many children use school transportation services, it's important that COVID-19 safety and sanitizing procedures be met to prevent the spread of the virus to students on their way to and from school. Maintaining social distancing on the bus may require additional buses or staggering schedules to meet the transportation needs of all students.

Before the school reopens, contracts with private bus services and drivers should be reviewed and, if necessary, revised to ensure that services and drivers follow all applicable state and local orders and directives, as well as CDC and OSHA guidance, related to cleaning and disinfecting buses. In addition, procedures to follow to maintain social distancing while buses are en-route with students should be addressed. Considerations include:

- Sanitize buses after each trip with EPA-approved disinfectants. Elements to sanitize should include:
 - Entry handrails
 - Seats (fronts and backs)
 - Window handles
 - Driver controls
- Supply each bus with a hand sanitizer station. Drivers should be trained as to how to instruct students to use it.
- Supply each bus with tissues and no-touch trash cans.
- Post signage emphasizing social distancing and good hygiene—specifically, proper hand sanitizing, coughing/sneezing etiquette, and disposal of used tissues.
- Require/encourage students to practice social distancing by:
 - Standing 6 feet away from other students when lining up to board or disembark from the bus
 - Sitting one to a seat
 - Keeping their distance from their bus neighbors when on the bus

School Access

Controlling school access, especially restricting visitor access, will help limit personal interactions. Visitors could include parents, community members, delivery personnel, and installation and repair crews.

- Make necessary changes to employee entrances and exits to minimize the touching of door handles and maintain proper social distancing.
- Develop and implement a policy to screen and control access to the school by visitors.
- Establish procedures to inform and instruct all visitors of the actions and procedures in place within the school to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Instruct visitors who are allowed to enter the building to adhere to posted signs and visual cues throughout the school.
- Require visitors to wear PPE such as masks and gloves, and provide the PPE if necessary.

Communication

An effective and efficient reopening of the school depends on clear, consistent communication between school administrators and their students, the students' families, and employees. Students and employees may be apprehensive and anxious about returning to the school due to health and safety concerns. Effective communication can build trust and ease concerns.

- Before reopening, develop and implement a communication plan to inform students, families, and employees of:
 - Who is expected to return to the school and when
 - Any changes to how students and employees access the school
 - Any wellness monitoring they may be subject to before or upon entering the school
 - The cleaning and disinfecting activities that occurred before reopening and the plan in place to continue cleaning and disinfecting the school
 - The actions taken to enhance social distancing and the safety of students within the school
 - How to report any safety or health issues or concerns, including possible cases of COVID-19, and their right to report safety and health concerns without fear of retaliation
- Develop a plan to manage and communicate changes in policies and procedures as the COVID-19 situation evolves.
- Communicate proper hygiene and social distancing practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to students and employees electronically.
- Explain the reason for school-related safety measures, including discussing the scientific considerations.
- Post visual cues and signage throughout the school to remind students, employees, and visitors of proper hygiene and social distancing practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Reinforce the healthy practices that students should follow by communicating them on a regular basis through announcements or other effective methods.
- Communicate in a language students, families, and employees understand.

Training

Faculty and staff have been away from the school for quite some time, and the school they are returning to may be unlike the one they left weeks or months ago. Adequate training will be required to help them get reacquainted with their responsibilities and the "new normal" that exists within the school.

- Train personnel conducting cleaning and disinfecting appropriately for the task.
- Train employees and school visitors on the hazards of COVID-19 exposure, how to report a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, and proper procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including:
 - Hand-washing
 - Coughing/sneezing etiquette

- Social distancing
- Masks and face coverings
- Other PPE
- Train faculty and staff or designated individuals to enforce policies on:
 - Hand-washing
 - Coughing/sneezing etiquette
 - Social distancing
 - Masks and face coverings
 - PPE
- Train employees to carry out different roles and responsibilities, as needed, if the school is operating with a reduction of on-site employees.