



2021-2022 COVID-19 Guidelines for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Manchester

*For the most up-to-date guidelines please refer to our website:
<https://www.catholicnh.org/schools/>*

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August 25, 2021

Dear New Hampshire Catholic School Community,

Catholic schools in New Hampshire have been in the forefront of in-classroom learning for the entire 2020-2021 academic year. Through the unwavering commitment of our school leaders, faculty, staff, and parents we were able to educate over 3,500 students in classrooms for the duration of the year with over 500 new students experiencing Catholic education for the very first time.

Our faculty and staff are to be especially commended for their courage and perseverance throughout the many challenges in making learning in the classroom possible. Considering current CDC & NHHS guidance, current data trends, proven practices in our Catholic schools, input from Catholic school leaders, and input from parents with regards to their children; the Catholic School Office for the Diocese of Manchester has developed the following 2021-2022 COVID-19 Guidelines for all diocesan and parish Catholic schools.

As we move forward as a community of faith, it is important to note that this new guidance is designed to provide a better balance between in-classroom learning and necessary protocols for the safety of all students, faculty, and staff in our buildings.

We pray in thanksgiving for our ability to deliver in-person learning for the entire year and that our Lord bless each of you and your families abundantly. We pray especially, through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, that our Lord continue to bless every Catholic school community in our diocese with more wonderful families to experience the beauty of the education our schools provide.

Yours in Christ,

Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Manchester

I. Introduction

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Manchester successfully delivered in-classroom instruction this past year despite many challenges; however, these challenges demonstrated the incredible sacrifice, perseverance, and courage by our families, faculty, and staff. Learning from this experience, the Catholic School Office for the Diocese of Manchester has developed the following COVID-19 guidelines for Catholic diocesan and parish schools to implement during the 2021-2022 school year. These guidelines were informed by the Diocese of Manchester COVID guidance for parishes, CDC, NH DHHS, current infection rates, current vaccination data, medical professionals, best practices learned in our Catholic schools, input from Catholic school leaders, the Diocesan School Board, and input from parents with regards to their children.

These guidelines intentionally attempt balance the physical safety of employees, students, families, and visitors with the spiritual, academic, physical, and emotional needs of individual students and employees. They are based on currently known COVID-19 trends in New Hampshire and **may be updated as new information or requirements become available over the course of the 2021-2022 academic year.**

These guidelines are to assist Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of Manchester in updating their COVID-19 school plans to conform to diocesan norms.

II. Establishment of a Health and Safety Committee by the local School Advisory Board

The continuation of a formal COVID Taskforce is no longer necessary, however, being an integral part of a school's governance, it is important that the advisory board consult school leadership regarding COVID-19 planning and decision making moving forward. Therefore, each school board will create a Health and Safety Committee to assist the school leader in following these guidelines during the 2021-2022 academic year. The committee may have non-board members serve on the committee and, as input from all stakeholders is essential, it is highly recommended that the committee include at least one school employee, **a local medical professional**, a parent, a board member, the school leader, and the pastor in the case of a parish school. School boards should be consulted and have input regarding the plan brought forth by the committee to assist school leadership in adhering to these guidelines. *The ultimate goal for the committee is review and assist in the implementation of these COVID -19 Guidelines so the educational experience of our students and their families remains safe yet uninterrupted. Adjustments to the school's plan should only be made if new there is new local or state COVID-19 data or requirements during the academic year that would require a change in the plan.*

III. Develop a 2021-2022 School COVID Plan

Plans, in union with diocesan COVID-19 Guidelines, will balance safety, risk, cost, and logistics with the spiritual, emotional, and academic needs of students when developing a new plan. Understanding current COVID data in your local community, how well the school leveraged ESSER and EANS funding, the school's current resources, and the school's continued needs will help the committee prioritize what is necessary and what can logistically be accomplished. The following guidance are points of inclusion that must be addressed in the school's 2021-2022 COVID plan for the beginning of the year.

1. Continue building a culture that promotes Staying Home or Going home when you are sick or not feeling well:

Employees and students must stay at home and not report to school if they are sick or not feeling well. They must also notify a designated contact person at the school to inform them of their decision to stay home. Being sick or not feeling well includes having but not limited to the following symptoms:

- a. Have a fever or feel feverish in the last 72 hours, including chills, or shaking.
- b. Experiencing any new muscle aches or pains, headache, nausea, severe fatigue without apparent cause, or diarrhea
- c. Changes in sense of taste or smell
- d. Temperature over 100 degrees
- e. Sudden onset of respiratory symptoms such as cough, or shortness of breath (unless known medical condition such as COPD or CHF). If they suffer annually from allergies (e.g. sneezing, red eyes, runny nose & cough), have them discuss these symptoms with the designated contact person. If they do not normally suffer allergies, they will be asked to get a doctor's note.

If an employee or student gets sick or is not feeling well at school, they must notify the designated contact person and leave the building immediately. If they are not able to leave the building immediately due to their condition or lack of transportation, then they will be directed to a designated isolation area. School leadership will work with employees if they need to remain home after demonstrating symptoms to discuss their available sick time and the possibility of working remotely if the employee is able. If any issues arise, school leadership will work with the diocesan Human Resource Department to explore all options including sick leave and disability time if necessary.

2. Create a consistent process for when employees or students need to be home sick or in quarantine:

If an employee or student gets sick at school and needs to return home or is already home sick, the designated contact person will contact the employee or the parents for further discussion. If the employee or parents of a sick student determine quarantine is necessary based on [New Hampshire Quarantine Guidelines](#) accommodations will be made for remote instruction and learning if they are well enough to work/learn at home. See the [New Hampshire Quarantine Guidelines](#) for more details.

Students and employees will follow the state and Federal guidelines on quarantining and isolation for those who test positive, travel outside the United States or on cruise ships, or have close contact with someone who has symptoms or confirmed COVID-19. Relevant guidance can be found here:

<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/covid19/documents/employee-travel-guidance.pdf>
<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/covid19/documents/travel-guidance.pdf>

3. Mask Use and Decision Matrix:

1. Mask Use

The goal for every Catholic school remains to leave mask use a parental choice for families and a personal choice for employees. The shift to universal face mask use should be implemented only when community and school conditions dictate that such a shift would be critical in preventing the disruption of in-person learning.

Every Catholic school will strive to leave the decision of mask use to the individual employee and parents regarding the use of masks by their children whenever possible.

As of July 21, 2021, NH DPHS is still recommending face mask use based on a local assessment of risk from COVID-19 in the community. Based on current COVID trends in NH, school leaders may adjust their COVID plans and increase COVID mitigations (including universal mask wearing) depending on what is happening in their local community. When discerning such changes, our school leaders, in consultation with their school boards' health and safety committees, are being asked to consider the following before requesting an increase in the level of COVID mitigations, including universal mask wearing for all students and employees:

- First and foremost, an assessment of risk from COVID-19 in their local school and surrounding community,
- Parental authority over medical decisions for their children,
- The social/emotional/spiritual health of students and staff,
- And the academic needs of students.

The primary factors to consider when determining whether indoor face mask use is appropriate are:

- 1) Increasing COVID-19 in the surrounding community; and
- 2) Increasing infections and clusters within the school; and
- 3) Whether the risk of COVID-19 in the school community **outweighs** parental authority and the social/emotional, academic, and spiritual needs of the students and employees.

Once the risk of COVID-19 in their local community outweighs parental authority and the social/emotional, spiritual, and academic health of the students as determined by school leaders and their advisory bodies, it makes sense to move to universal mask wearing in 2-week period increments, with re-assessments after two weeks. It remains a primary goal that the decision to wear a face mask be left to parent and employee choice. **Any change towards universal mask wearing may only be enacted after the school leader receives approval from the Superintendent.** You may find updated NH COVID numbers by region at <https://www.covid19.nh.gov/>.

2. Decision Matrix for Indoor Mask Use

It is recommended that each school adopt the following decision matrix which was informed by the NHDPHS decision matrix published on August 11, 2021 but modified to meet our criteria for determining when indoor mask use will be required during the 2021-2022 school year.

Catholic School Recommended Decision Matrix for Indoor Mask Use

(Informed by the NHDPHS Indoor Face Mask Recommendation Matrix)

		Level of Community Transmission		
		Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Cases Within Facility	0 Known Cases of COVID among Students and Employees	Parental and Employee Decision*	Parental and Employee Decision*	Parental and Employee Decision*
	Sporadic Cases without Evidence of Facility Transmission	Parental and Employee Decision*	Parental and Employee Decision*	Universal [†]
	Single Cluster	Targeted	Targeted	Universal [†]
	Multiple Cluster or a Larger Outbreak	Universal [†]	Universal [†]	Universal [†]

*We strongly encourage the use of masks for anyone over the age of two when indoors at school and especially those more vulnerable or are concerned for more vulnerable family members at home.

[†]Exceptions are encouraged when schools have achieved high vaccination rates or are participating in the NH Safer at School asymptomatic testing program.

universal face mask use is required, the requirement only applies to indoor settings. During those limited periods when community transmission or cases within the school require universal face mask use, the school will endeavor to provide opportunities for mask breaks throughout the day.

For levels of community transmission, the school will rely on the assessment of NH counties located on the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (“NHDHHS”) school dashboard located at: <https://www.covid19.nh.gov/dashboard/schools>. See example below:



Each school leader, in conjunction with the Health and Safety Committee of the Advisory Board, should review the metrics weekly in order to respond to what is happening in their local community and school facility in a timely manner. The school should focus on the level of community transmission in the each of counties in which their students and employees reside.

4. Covid Vaccines will not be required for employees, students, or visitors and school employees will remember that a person's vaccination status is personal medical information:

Students, employees, and visitors will not be asked if they have been vaccinated.

The direction of Bishop Libasci in his June 6th Letter to the Faithful is most appropriate when he stated, *"In making a decision whether to wear a mask, those who have not been vaccinated must be mindful of the need to take other safeguards for the care of self and others, as recommended by public health authorities. In any event, let us not shame or admonish other people whatever course of action they decide to take."*

5. Frequently washing or sanitizing hands throughout the day

Sanitizing stations should be placed so employees, students, and visitors can sanitize their hands upon entry. Employees and students should wash or sanitize their hands at scheduled intervals throughout the day and upon entry into classrooms after traversing through common areas include hallways, lobbies, café, elevators, stairways, meeting rooms, and restrooms. Instructions regarding how to wash hands shall be posted at all sinks throughout the building. Sanitizer must be provided upon entry to each classroom and common area. The following are some resources from the CDC on handwashing and sanitizing. Keep in mind that handwashing is ALWAYS preferred to sanitizing.

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html>

6. Social distancing is strongly encouraged between individuals when possible and practical.

Student desks should be at least three feet apart in the classroom and students should socially distance at least three feet if at all possible at large gatherings or when cohorts are not possible.

7. Disinfecting Desk Areas and Shared Supplies should remain the norm:

Desks will be disinfected with an EPA approved disinfecting wipe or disinfection solution between each student use and at the end of the school day, including shared computer keyboards, mice, or any other shared student supplies. Shared supplies and materials among students will be limited.

8. Visitors:

Visitors to the building are allowed and will not be required to complete a screening form or have their temperatures taken. However, we ask that visitors do not come to the building if they are sick under any circumstances. Signs will be posted on our entrances asking staff and visitors to not enter if they are sick. Visitors may be asked to wear a mask as stated in Section 3 above.

9. Common Areas:

Holy Mass: Schools will return to attending Holy Mass and other liturgical services in person, following the diocesan guidance for Holy Mass.

Lunch and the Cafeteria: Employees and students may return to using the cafeteria. Handwashing before and after is strongly encouraged as well as continued social distancing or keeping groups of students in a cohort.

Restrooms: Employees and students must wash hands upon entering and leaving. The school should continue to consider staggering times of use, social distancing, and frequent cleanings of the bathroom throughout the day.

Outside Areas and Playgrounds: Outside areas may be used for lunches, gym, recess, etc. Masks should not be worn by students when participating in physical exercise.

Co-curriculars: Schools will resume co-curricular offerings following the above-mentioned guidelines.

10. All schools will have a communication plan to educate staff, families, and children about COVID-19 health and safety practices at the school:

Schools should understand the importance of explaining the “why” and not just informing the community of the plan and updates to the plan when applicable as this may prevent as many questions or concerns for families and employees. Continual formation of employees and students regarding best practices for continued health and reminders of school protocols should be sent to the community on a regular basis. Best practices for a healthy environment should be included to the school handbook. It is important to remember that parents consider safety of paramount importance when selecting a school for their children.

11. Best practices as learned this past year:

- a. Maintain an abundant supply of PPE, cleaning supplies, and other necessary materials.
- b. As much as possible, handle requests from parents and employees for reasonable accommodations.
- c. Classroom or grade level cohorts have been the best prevention from keeping entire schools moving to remote learning during an increase in COVID cases.
- d. Minister to the spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing of the faculty, staff, and students. Frequent and consistent spiritual and emotional development is essential.
- e. Students learn most effectively when distractions are limited and a return to normalcy is critical to student success.
- f. Communication and transparency with parents and staff is paramount to a healthy community.

IV: Monitor Ongoing Health Updates and the Effectiveness of the Plan:

After the school year begins, the Health and Safety Committee of the Board should continue to meet regularly and provide consultation to the Principal/Head of School on the latest information from the

diocese, CDC, and NH DHHS. The committee should assist in the discernment of additional COVID mitigations if an outbreak occurs in the school or there is an increase of cases within the school's local region. If a case of COVID-19 is confirmed, the school must be in immediate communication with the Superintendent.