

2020-2021

Return to **SCHOOL**

An Education in Safe Planning
and Social Distancing



Schools, school districts, institutes of higher learning (and more) are struggling with what decisions are the “right” ones.

Critical decisions include when to go back and how to go back. In many cases the right answers to those decisions will not be known until classroom doors open. What could be considered “right” for one school may not be right for the other. Considerations are numerous and the task at hand is daunting. To help, NMC has provided a few tips and resources to aid in your decision making this summer.

What is social distancing?

The term “social distancing” refers to measures being taken to restrict where and when people can gather in order to stop or slow the spread of infectious disease. In general, six (6) feet of separation is the distance that should be kept between people interacting within their community. This recommendation is most important in the setting of a large gathering where there is intermingling of people whose symptom status may be hard to monitor.

Small consistent groups of students and staff offer the opportunity to more closely control the environment through monitoring of symptoms and adherence to policies for people who are ill. Additionally, staff can build routines for students to wash hands upon entering and leaving the classroom or program space and create regular cleaning practices for frequently used items such as desks, program equipment, writing utensils, and other programmatic materials. Social distancing guidance will support a 3-foot radius around each participant, resulting in a 6-foot total distance between any two people.



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SOCIAL DISTANCING

Have a plan and prepare

- » The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that all businesses identify program coordinators who are responsible for COVID-19 issues and preventive activities. As a best practice, this could also apply to educational facilities.
- » Communicate with teachers, students, staff and families prior to classes beginning to set expectations for the school year. Communication should include what strategies will be implemented to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure and to acknowledge that strategies may change if the level of community transmission increases to the point where in-person teaching must be disrupted.
- » Families should understand what actions they need to take should their child become symptomatic or be exposed to COVID-19.

Promote a safe environment

- » Adapt practices to allow physical distancing of at least six (6) feet whenever possible.
- » Try to adhere to a staff (or volunteer) to participant ratio of 1:9 (this may vary from community to community). If social distancing cannot be attained with the group size, then the number of students should be reduced.
- » Within the school, create consistent groups of the same staff, teachers, and students with a maximum number for each group.
- » Whenever possible, implement teaching that refrains from intermixing groups. If intermixing of groups is necessary, limit the number of groups that intermix and keep records of staff, teachers, and students that intermix.
- » Have a plan for back-up staffing in case a staff or teachers become ill.
 - Note: this may mean additional personnel must self-quarantine.
- » Wherever possible, hold activities outdoors and encourage students to spread out.
- » If social distancing cannot be adhered to for some activities, cancel the activity.
- » Avoid having areas easily accessible that would allow staff, teachers, or students to easily congregate in a limited space.
- » Reduce the number of people on transportation buses to allow them to spread out. Consider using visual cues to illustrate where students may sit to adhere to social distancing.
 - Mark seats where students should not sit.

How can programs practice social distancing in an indoor environment?

Maintain safe program spaces

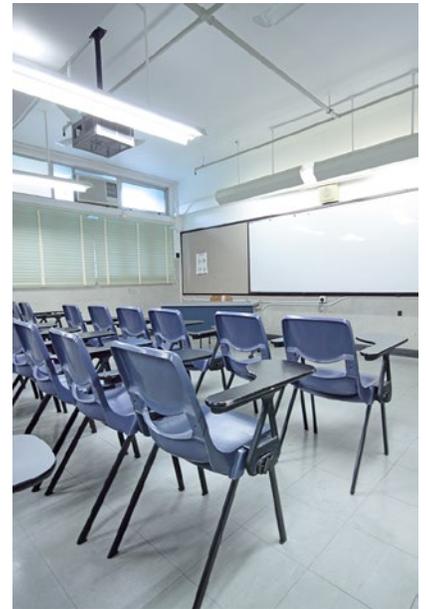
- » Modify classes where students are likely to be in very close contact.
- » Bring in specialist staff (e.g., music, art, physical education) to individual classrooms versus rotating all kids through a shared space that is not able to be cleaned with each new participant introduction.
- » Whenever possible, hold physical education and music classes outside and encourage students to spread out. Consider using visual cues to demonstrate physical spacing. Due to varying weather/season across the United States, in some areas this is a short-term solution at best.
- » Rearrange desks and common seating spaces to maximize the space between students.
- » Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) to reduce transmission



FACE COVERINGS

caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing).

- Regardless of student ages, make sure everyone is clear and understand proper hygiene practice. Reinforce those practices through regular reminders, visual aids (e.g. posters, signs).
- » Consider using visual aids to mark social distancing (e.g., floor tapes, footprints, slip resistant floor labels) to illustrate traffic flow and appropriate spacing to support social distancing.
 - Consider one-way directional traffic flow and exit and entry only areas.
- » Avoid community supplies when possible.
- » If shared supplies are necessary, consider using designated bins for clean and used supplies. Community supplies are considered high-touch and should be cleaned frequently.
 - Do not share equipment between staff, teachers, and students when possible.
 - Clean high touch surfaces between different groups, and on a regular basis.
- » Consider ways to accommodate the needs of children and families at risk for serious illness from COVID-19.
- » Honor requests of parents who may have concerns about their children attending the program due to underlying medical conditions of those in their home.
- » Staff and teachers who cannot be at work due to their own high-risk conditions should be offered alternatives for working.
- » The CDC lists underlying medical conditions that may increase the risk of serious COVID-19 for people of any age: Groups at Higher Risk for Severe Illness (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>).



Promote cloth face coverings

- » Follow cloth face covering guidance for schools and childcare.
- » Staff and teachers should be encouraged to wear cloth face coverings during the workday as much as possible.
- » Consider requiring that students/children only wear cloth face coverings if they can reliably wear, remove, and handle the cloth face covering throughout the day.
- » Older students, from middle school through college are more readily able to wear a face covering for extended periods.
- » Teach and reinforce use of **cloth face coverings**. Face coverings may be challenging for students (especially younger students) to wear in all-day settings such as school. Face coverings should be worn by staff and students (particularly older





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students) as feasible and are most essential in times when social distancing is difficult. Individuals should be frequently reminded not to touch the face covering and to **wash their hands** frequently. Information should be provided to staff, students, and students' families on **proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings**.

- Note: **Cloth face coverings** should not be placed on:
 - Children younger than two (2) years old
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious
 - Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance
- » **Cloth face coverings** are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. **Cloth face coverings** are not surgical masks, respirators, or other medical personal protective equipment.

Strategize mealtimes

- » Wherever feasible, encourage bag lunches from home.
- » Stagger mealtimes to minimize the number of people dining inside at one time and keep people six (6) feet apart.
 - Do not intermix groups and maintain a consistent group of groups that are dining at the same time each day whenever possible.
 - These steps will help minimize transmission and allow for swift contact tracing if needed.
 - Clean and disinfect common surfaces between groups.
 - If meals are typically served family-style, plate each meal to serve it so that multiple people are not using the same serving utensils (e.g., have staff serve food to students).
 - Serve meals outside or in alternative indoor areas as weather allows.
 - Account for Food Service Worker safety.

Minimize opportunities for mixing between groups

- » Stagger arrival and/or dismissal times.
- » Minimize crowding at drop-off and pick-up times.
 - Designate times for families to come, consider staggering times if possible.
 - Whenever possible, participant pick-up and drop-off should occur outside.
 - Add visual cues or barriers to direct traffic flow and distancing.
 - Develop signage and processes to minimize interactions of families.
- » Consider dividing participant entry points rather than funneling all students through the same entry space. These approaches can limit the amount of close contact between students in high-traffic situations and times.
- » As noted earlier, consider making exit and entry only modifications. Be sure to account for emergency needs meaning that, in and emergency and entry only area can clearly be an exit.
- » Recognizing that busing times are often tightly scheduled consider making arrival schedule changes for students who walk or are dropped off by a parent or caregiver.
- » Cancel field trips, assemblies, and other large gatherings if infection rates remain consistent





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- within the local community.
- » Consider canceling activities and events like field trips, participant assemblies, athletic events, practices, special performances, program-wide meetings, or spirit nights.
 - » Consider changing events to a virtual format where appropriate.
 - » For younger children, consider staggering playground use rather than allowing multiple classes to play together. Limit other activities where multiple classes interact.
 - » Wash hands before and after touching play structures and maintain 6 feet of space from other children as much as possible. When possible, build in visual cues that demonstrate physical spacing.
 - » If possible, consider cleaning high touch areas of the play structure between groups.
 - » For schools, consider allowing flexibility in recess policies and the use of teacher time to allow for supervision of classroom recess.
 - » Avoid contact with shared public amenities like picnic tables, benches, and playground equipment.
 - Assume such equipment has not been cleaned.
 - Have staff, teachers, and students wash hands or use hand sanitizer if they come into contact or use shared amenities.
 - » Avoid taking multiple groups to the bathrooms at once (e.g., avoid having all classes use the bathroom right after lunch or recess).
 - Make sure bathrooms are clearly marked with hand washing reminders.
 - » Limit nonessential visitors into the school or on campus.
 - » Limit the presence of teachers within the building.
 - » Consider virtual formats for guest speakers and reading programs.
 - » For schools, move parent-teacher conferences to phone conferences or a virtual format.
 - Do not allow the public access to indoor facilities when a program is in progress.
 - Limit access to indoor facilities to staff, teachers, and students.
 - » Provide reminders about the importance of not sharing food or drinks.
 - » If possible, consider cleaning high touch areas of the play structure between groups.
 - » Exercise caution when using drinking fountains.
 - Think carefully about how drinking fountains are being used and how regularly they are being cleaned in deciding to use them. Consider encouraging students to use refillable water bottles to avoid direct contact with the fountain equipment.
 - If you do use them, ensure there are hand hygiene products available right next to the drinking fountain and encourage users to perform hand hygiene before and after using one.





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Encourage and reinforce social norms and health etiquette

- » Promote materials and trainings to ensure that staff, teachers, and students:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after having been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Hand Hygiene (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>)
 - Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your arm or elbow.
 - Cover Your Cough (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>).
- » Ask staff, teachers, and students to wash hands upon arriving, before and after eating meals, and when entering or leaving indoor spaces.
 - Consider ways to reinforce good hand hygiene. This may include readily accessible sanitation and/or hand sanitizer stations.
- » Have hand sanitizer and tissues readily available for use by staff, teachers, and students.
 - These can be found on the stations mentioned above
- » Ensure the availability of appropriate cleaning supplies (e.g., disinfectant wipes) for cleaning of high-touch surfaces (sanitation stations).
- » Educate staff, teachers, and students on the importance of avoiding touching their faces throughout the day and washing their hands when they do.
- » Ensure students are not sharing water bottles, food, or other items.
- » Avoid using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools or equipment.
- » Consider engaging students in developing communications or creative strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- » Hang up posters, make ongoing PA announcements promoting health and hygiene etiquette expectations.



Promote health checks

- » Promote social distancing and reduce congestion in the health or main office. This would also apply to teacher lounge areas.
- » Use the health services office for students, staff, and teachers with COVID-19 like symptoms and, if possible, create a satellite location for first aid or medication distribution should this be needed.
- » Allow for flexible administration of health care tasks for students who are able to independently manage needs.
- » Consider using visual cues to demonstrate physical spacing.
- » Emphasize the importance of daily health checks.



SCREENING

- This includes screening for students, staff, and teachers to ensure those who develop symptoms are not attending.
- » Screening process for children: Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-forchildcare.html#ScreenChildren)
- Consider using a similar system to the employee screening checklist.
- If it is not feasible to conduct health screening given the setting:
 - Provide parent education about the importance of monitoring symptoms and staying home while ill through classroom applications and other district messaging.
 - Ask about access to thermometers and consider implementing temperature checks for households that do not have one.
 - Use existing outreach systems to provide text and email reminders to staff and families to check for symptoms of household members in the morning and evening.
- Provide signage notifying entrants that health checks may be (or are) required.
- » Use exclusion guidance and isolate symptomatic staff and program students.
 - Follow exclusions guidance and ensure staff and participants stay home when sick.
 - Ensure sick policies are supportive of students and staff staying home when sick.
 - Have a plan if staff or students get sick.
 - Make a plan with parents prior to sessions around expectations if their child becomes ill while at school.
 - Plan to have a room or area that can be used to isolate a symptomatic staff member, volunteer, or students while they wait to be picked up or are able to leave on their own; ensure there is enough space for multiple people placed at least 6 feet apart (in the case more than one participant becomes ill).
 - Ensure that they have hygiene supplies available, including a cloth mask, facial tissues, and alcohol-based hand rub.
 - If you end up having a participant or staff who is diagnosed with COVID-19 reach out to your local public health agency for further direction.



Promote a safe workplace for staff

- » Hold staff meetings virtually or in a large enough space to accommodate social distancing.
- » Encourage non-essential planning and preparatory activities be conducted outside program facilities.
 - Consider allowing staff and teachers to use alternate spaces (e.g., telecommute) for discretionary preparation time.
 - Conduct professional development virtually whenever possible.
- » Ensure policies are supportive of students, staff, and teachers staying home when sick and offer options for people who are at high risk of developing serious symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- » Explore opportunities for staff and teachers who cannot be on-site due to their own high-risk conditions or those of their family members to complete work using alternate spaces (e.g., telecommute).



OK TO SIT

» Ensure classroom access to hand hygiene products (e.g., hand sanitizer, soap, tissues, disinfectant wipes).

- Ensure the availability of appropriate cleaning supplies (e.g., disinfectant wipes) for cleaning of high-touch surfaces.
- Have hand sanitizer and tissues readily available for use by students, staff, and teachers throughout the building.



» Arrange classrooms to allow staff and teachers to practice social distancing.

- Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing students) to reduce transmission caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing).
- Ensure daily cleaning of the program environment.
- Routine cleaning and disinfecting is key to maintaining a safe environment for staff, teachers, and students. Cleaning removes dirt and most germs and is usually done with soap and water. Disinfecting kills most germs, depending on the type of chemical, and only when the chemical product is used as directed on the label.
- Adapt practices to ensure high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, stair rails, counters, dining hall tables and benches, program equipment, and other items are regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Institutes of Higher Education (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>)
- Clean and disinfect bathrooms regularly, particularly high-touch surfaces, and ensure they have handwashing supplies.
- Use EPA-registered household disinfectants recommended by the CDC – Information on Disinfectants: (www.epa.gov/coronavirus).
- Dedicate individual classroom and office materials.
- Do not share writing utensils, classroom, and office supplies between students, staff, or teachers (when possible).
- Frequently clean office materials or equipment that cannot be designated.
- Place hand hygiene supplies near shared equipment (e.g., printer/copier).



ONLINE
RESOURCES

Educational Institution-Oriented Resources

School Reopening Decision Tool

CDC guidance for School, Youth Programs, and Childcare

CDC guidance for Colleges, Universities, and Higher Learning Institutions

CDC guidance for Cleaning & Disinfecting Public Spaces (including Schools)

Youth Sports Considerations

FAQ's for K-12 School Administrators

FAQ's for Institutes of Higher Education



CITATIONS

Works Cited

"Institutes of Higher Education." Online posting. 18 March 2020. <http://CDC.gov>

"Guidance for Social Distancing in Youth and Student Programs." Online posting. 13 May 2020. Minnesota Department of Health <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/>

"Communities, Schools, Workplaces, and Events." Online posting. 19 May 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

Covid-19 Hygiene Checklist for Schools

Many manufacturer's already have effective protocols in place for sanitation and hygiene in their facilities. The COVID-19 situation requires extra vigilance, however. Follow this checklist to ensure you protect your team members and your physical plant environments during the pandemic.

<p>HAND SANITIZING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Increase the number of hand sanitizing stations throughout your facility.» Use hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.» Enforce a policy of no handshakes, fist bumps, high fives or even elbow touches.	<p>SOCIAL DISTANCING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Ensure staff, students, teachers and visitors know to stand 6-feet away from one another where possible.» Rotate recess, lunches, etc. to prevent large gatherings.» Limit staff meeting sizes.» Encourage staff, students, teachers to stay home if experiencing symptoms or if close to someone who is with a contagious illness.» Restrict visitors on-site to essential personnel.	<p>PPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Increase use of PPE, specifically masks. If required, ensure that students have ready access to a supply.	<p>GENERAL SANITIZATION PRACTICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Add staff for sanitation purposes, for example clean restrooms, break areas/cafeterias, doorknobs, etc. on a 2-hour cycle.	<p>HAND SANITIZING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Take voluntary temporal thermometer readings of anyone who wishes to enter your site.» Require any staff or teachers self-monitoring at home to provide a symptom and temperature log upon returning to work.» Turn away anyone with symptoms or who declines to participate in screening if required at the school.

