

Reopening New York City: Checklist for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K to Grade 12 Schools

Once they are authorized to open, New York City (NYC) pre-K to grade 12 schools — including public and private (both secular and non-secular) elementary, middle and high schools — must follow New York State (NYS) requirements for in-person instruction.

Review the NYS [requirements](#) and [affirm compliance](#). Before opening, you must develop a [safety plan](#) and keep it on site.

Remember, there is still community transmission of COVID-19 in NYC. Keep in mind the core four actions for preventing COVID-19:

- **Stay home if sick:** Stay home if you are sick unless you are leaving for essential medical care (including COVID-19 testing) or other essential errands.
- **Physical distancing:** Stay at least 6 feet away from others.
- **Wear a face covering:** Protect those around you. You can be contagious without symptoms and spread the disease when you cough, sneeze or talk. Face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Practice healthy hand hygiene:** Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; clean frequently touched surfaces regularly; avoid touching your face with unwashed hands; and cover your cough or sneeze with your arm, not your hands.

Before Reopening

The NYC Health Department recommends you take these steps before reopening your school if it's been closed to be sure your school is ready for staff and students.

- Flush all faucets (5 to 10 days before opening) for at least 10 minutes. Flush cold water from all outlets first, and then flush hot water.
- Discard perishable food from the kitchen area.
- Review expiration dates of all stocked items.
- Check refrigerator temperature is at or below 41 degrees F.
- Check the batteries of carbon monoxide and smoke detectors and fire alarms.
- Check inspection date of fire extinguishers, recording date of last inspection.
- Check that fire extinguishers are in working order and replace any that have expired.
- Check that any exit lights are visible and illuminated.
- Check that any interior fire alarms are in good working order.
- Clean and disinfect all indoor spaces, including kitchens, bathrooms and common areas (see [General Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting for Non-Health Care Settings](#)).
- Clean and disinfect all outdoor equipment and make sure that all structures are free of any hazards.

- Clean and sanitize all toys and play equipment. Remove any that cannot easily and frequently be cleaned and sanitized (e.g., plush toys).
- Make sure that hand washing facilities are functioning and properly stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Designate additional hand washing or sanitizing stations, if possible.
- Make sure that there are enough cleaning supplies. Use [EPA-registered sanitizers and disinfectants](#) effective against COVID-19.
- Check that exits are not blocked.
- Check for leaks and make repairs, as needed.
- Survey walls for peeling paint and mold and address problems, as needed.
- Survey and clean any outdoor play area.
- Maximize outdoor air flow through the ventilation system, as possible.
- Make sure first-aid kits are complete and replace any expired products.
- Check lighting and replace any burned out lights.
- Ensure electrical outlets are properly secured.

Summary of New York State (NYS) Requirements and Best Practices

These are the mandates and recommended best practices from the NYS [summary guidelines](#). Be sure to also review the [detailed guidelines](#), affirm compliance and develop a [safety plan](#) before you start.

Social Distancing and Face Coverings

Mandates

- Ensure that social distancing (of at least 6 ft. or a physical barrier) is maintained between individuals while in school facilities and on school grounds, including in the cafeteria, unless safety or the core activity (e.g. moving equipment, using an elevator, traveling in common areas) requires a shorter distance or individuals are of the same household.
- If social distancing is not possible, individuals must wear acceptable face coverings; excluding students who are unable to medically tolerate a face covering.
- Be prepared to don a face covering if another person unexpectedly cannot socially distance; for this reason, individuals – including students – must wear face coverings in common areas, such as entrances/exits, lobbies, and when traveling around the school.
- Acceptable face coverings for COVID-19 include but are not limited to cloth-based face coverings and surgical masks that cover both the mouth and nose.
- Provide acceptable face coverings to faculty and staff who directly interact with students or members of the public while at work at no cost to faculty/staff; and provide face coverings to any student who does not have their own, at no cost to the student.
- Train all students, faculty, and staff on how to adequately put on, take, off clean (as applicable), and discard PPE.
- Students must wear a face covering to ride the school bus and wear it while entering, exiting, and seated.
- Ensure social distancing while eating in the school cafeteria; if not possible, serve meals in alternate areas or staggered meal periods.
- Prohibit sharing of food and beverages (e.g. buffet style meals, snacks), unless individuals are

members of the same household.

Recommended best practices

- Face coverings are strongly recommended at all times, except for meals and classroom instruction with social distancing. Consider requiring face coverings even during instruction, especially in areas with higher community infection rates.
- Develop plans for face covering breaks for students when they can socially distance, particularly if the reopening plan requires face covering usage at all time.
- Consider assistance to students who may have difficulty in adapting to wearing a face covering.
- Faculty may use alternate PPE (i.e. face coverings that are transparent at or around the mouth) for instruction that requires visualization of the movement of the lips and/or mouths (e.g. speech therapy). These coverings may also be used for certain students (e.g. hearing impaired) who benefit from seeing more of the face of faculty/staff.
- Consider staggered arrival and pick-up times to facilitate proper social distancing and assign lockers by cohort or eliminate their use.
- Modify or reconfigure spaces and/or restrict the use of classrooms and other places where students, faculty, and staff congregate, so that individuals are at least 6 ft. apart in all directions (e.g. side-to-side and when facing one another), or separated by physical barriers, and are not sharing workstations without cleaning and disinfection between use.
- Ensure a distance of 12 ft. between individuals while participating in activities that require projecting the voice (e.g. singing), playing a wind instrument, or participating in aerobic activity (e.g. gym classes).
- On school buses, maintain social distancing unless members of the same household.

Gatherings and Operational Activity

Recommended best practices

- Consider measures that can be implemented to decrease density and congregation in school facilities and on school grounds, when possible, such as:
 - Finding alternative spaces in the community to allow for more in-person instruction;
 - Adjusting class or work hours, where appropriate;
 - Limiting in-person presence to only those staff who are necessary to be at school during school hours;
 - Maintaining or increasing remote workforce to accommodate social distancing guidelines;
 - Staggering schedules and allowing more time between classes to reduce congestion; and/or
 - Shifting design of class schedules.
- Place students in pre-assigned, self-contained cohorts with reasonable group size limits set forth in the school's plan, to the extent practicable to limit potential exposure, particularly for younger students.
 - Prevent intermingling across cohorts, to the extent possible (e.g. 10 ft. of distance or physical barrier).
 - Ensure cohorts contain the same students for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

- Faculty may instruct more than one cohort so long as appropriate social distancing is maintained.
- Reduce bi-directional foot traffic using tape or signs with arrows, and post signage/distance markers denoting 6 ft. of distance in commonly used areas and areas where lines are formed or people congregate (e.g. outdoor spaces, class rooms, cafeterias, health screening stations).
- Determine which facilities (e.g. libraries) will be closed to the public (i.e. not students, faculty, or staff), or offer limited, specific hours to members of the general public.
- Establish designated areas for student drop-off and pickup, limiting contact and entry of parents/legal guardians into the building, to the greatest extent possible.
- Limit the sharing of objects, such as laptops, notebooks, touchscreens, writing utensils, chalk and dry erase boards, musical instruments, tools, and toys, as well as the touching of shared surfaces, such as conference tables.

Hygiene, Cleaning, and Disinfection

Mandates

- Adhere to hygiene, cleaning, and disinfection requirements from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and [Department of Health](#) (DOH) and maintain logs that include the date, time, and scope of cleaning and disinfection. Identify cleaning and disinfection frequency for each facility type and assign responsibility.
- Train all students, faculty, and staff on proper hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Provide and maintain hand hygiene stations, including handwashing with soap, running warm water, and disposable paper towels, as well as an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60% or more alcohol for areas where handwashing is not feasible.
- Conduct regular cleaning and disinfection of facilities and more frequent cleaning and disinfection for high-risk areas used by many individuals and for frequently touched surfaces, including desks and cafeteria tables. Refer to Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) [products](#) identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as effective against COVID-19.
- Ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of restrooms and that distancing rules are adhered to.
- Provide for the cleaning and disinfection of exposed areas in the event an individual is confirmed to have COVID-19, with such cleaning and disinfection to include, at a minimum, all heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces. Refer to CDC [guidelines](#).

Recommended best practices

- Place hand sanitizer in convenient locations (e.g. building, classroom, and cafeteria entrances/exits), and install touch-free dispensers where possible.
- Place receptacles around the school for disposal of soiled items, including PPE.
- Ensure that cleaning and disinfection are the primary responsibility of the school's custodial staff, but provide appropriate cleaning and disinfection supplies to faculty and staff:
 - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g. keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down before/after use.
 - Install touch-free amenities, or make hand sanitizer available near high-touch surfaces (trash receptacles, paper towel dispensers).

- Close water drinking fountains (unless configured as bottle refilling stations) and encourage individuals to bring their own water bottles or use disposable cups.
- Best practices to implement in shared (communal) bathrooms include but are not limited to:
 - Install physical barriers between toilets and sinks if 6 ft. of separation isn't feasible.
 - Use paper towel dispensers in lieu of air dryers.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces between each individual's use, if shared. If cohorts are used, clean and disinfection can take place between each cohort's use.

Communication

Mandates

- Affirm you have reviewed and understand the State issued guidance and submit reopening plans prior to reopening. The State will decide on reopening dates for Pre-K through Grade 12 schools in early August 2020.
- Conspicuously post completed reopening plans at the school and on the school website for faculty, staff, students, and parents/legal guardians to access.
- Engage with school stakeholders and community members when developing reopening plans.
- Develop a communications plan for students, parents/ legal guardians, staff, and visitors.
- Encourage all students, faculty, staff and visitors to adhere to CDC/DOH guidance regarding the use of PPE, specifically face coverings, when distance of 6 ft. can't be maintained, through verbal communication and signage.
- Train all students, faculty, and staff how to follow new COVID-19 protocols safely and correctly, including but not limited to hand hygiene, proper face covering wearing, social distancing, and respiratory hygiene.

Recommended best practices

- Designate coordinators to be the main contact upon the identification of positive cases and who are responsible for subsequent communication. Coordinators should be responsible for answering questions from students, faculty, staff, and parents/legal guardians regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency and plans implemented by the school.
 - If possible, coordinators should also work closely with local health departments and other schools to monitor public health conditions and jointly develop monitoring strategies.

Screening and Tracking

Mandates

- Implement mandatory health screenings, including temperature checks, of students, faculty, staff, and, where applicable, contractors, vendors, and visitors.
- Conduct temperature checks for all individuals every day – ideally, at home, prior to departing to school – before entering any school facility.
- Ensure that personnel performing in-person screening activities are appropriately protected from exposure.
- Use a daily screening questionnaire for faculty and staff reporting to school; and periodically use a questionnaire for students, particularly younger students, who may require the assistance of their parent/legal guardian to answer. The questionnaire should determine

whether the individual has:

- a) Knowingly been in close or proximate contact in the past 14 days with anyone who has tested positive through a diagnostic test for COVID-19 or who has or had symptoms of COVID-19;
 - b) Tested positive through a diagnostic test for COVID-19 in the past 14 days;
 - c) Has experienced any symptoms of COVID-19, including a temperature of greater than 100.0°F, in the past 14 days; and/or
 - d) Has traveled internationally or from a state with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 per the New York State Travel Advisory in the past 14 days.
- Any individual who screens positive for COVID-19 exposure or symptoms, or who presents with a temperature greater than 100.0°F, must not be allowed to enter the school if screened outside, and must be immediately sent home with instructions to contact their health care provider for assessment and testing.
 - Students sent home because of a positive screen must be immediately separated from other students and supervised until picked up.
 - Immediately notify the state and local health department about the case if diagnostic test results are positive for COVID-19.
 - Develop protocols for caring for a student, faculty, or staff member who develops COVID-19 symptoms during the school day, including:
 - Identifying a dedicated area to separate students, faculty, or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 from others until they can go home or to a health care facility, depending on severity of illness;
 - Plans to ensure that symptomatic students waiting to be picked up remain under the visual supervision of a staff member who is physically distanced;
 - PPE requirements for school health office staff caring for sick individuals, which must include both standard and transmission-based precautions; and
 - Required guidelines for cleaning and disinfection.
 - Develop protocols for asthma-related acute respiratory treatment care using up to date standard of care.
 - In case of a positive test, develop plans with local health departments to trace all contacts of the individual, in accordance with the New York State Contact Tracing Program. Confidentiality must be maintained as required by federal/state law/regulations.
 - Ensure that reporting plans are in place for individuals who are alerted that they have come into close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19.
 - Include a process in reopening plans for if/when COVID19 cases are discovered, including closing areas/classes where individuals were infected, or the entire school in consultation with the local health department.
 - Establish policies, in consultation with the local health department(s), about the requirements for determining when individuals, particularly students, who screened positive for COVID-19 symptoms can return to the in-person learning environment. This returning to learning protocol must include at minimum documentation from a health care provider evaluation, negative COVID-19 testing, and symptom resolution, or if COVID-19 positive, release from isolation.

Recommended best practices

- Conduct screening remotely (e.g. by electronic survey, digital application, or telephone, which may involve the parent/legal guardian), before the individual reports to school, to the extent possible.
- Refer to CDC guidance on "[Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)" for the most up to date information on symptoms associated with COVID-19. Note that the manifestation of COVID-19 in children, although similar, is not always the same as that for adults. Children may be less likely to present with fever as an initial symptom, and may only have gastrointestinal tract symptoms, which should be taken into consideration during the screening process
- Remind parents/guardians that students may not attend school if they have had a temperature of greater than 100.0°F at any time in the past 14 days, even if a fever-reducing medication was administered and the student no longer has a fever.
- Implement health screening practices for unscheduled visitors (e.g. members of the public allowed to use school grounds).
- If feasible, offer optional contact tracing and tracking technology (e.g. mobile applications) to streamline contact tracing/communication processes.
- Partner with local health departments to train older students, faculty, and staff to undertake contract tracing efforts for populations in school facilities and on school grounds, where feasible.
- Refer to DOH's "[Interim Guidance for Public and Private Employees Returning to Work Following COVID-19 Infection or Exposure](#)" regarding protocols for faculty and staff seeking to return to work or class after a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 or after they've had close/proximate contact with a person with COVID-19.
- When COVID-19 cases are discovered at school, consider restricting social contact and mobility within school facilities/grounds, particularly in affected areas to avoid full school closures.
- Identify clearly defined measures that will serve as warning signs that the level of COVID-19 transmission may be increasing in the school setting beyond an acceptable level, as defined by state and local health departments.
- Modify operations prior to instituting school-wide closures to help mitigate a rise in cases.
- Remain aware that quarantine of students, faculty, or staff may be required after international travel or travel within certain states with widespread community transmission of COVID-19.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves. 8.27.20