



## Reopening New York City: Additional Requirements for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K to Grade 12 Nonpublic and Charter Schools

Pursuant to an [Order of the Commissioner of Health](#), nonpublic schools and charter schools that are not located in an NYC Department of Education school building must adhere to additional COVID-19 risk-reduction measures. Schools that do not follow the below may be fined up to \$1,000 per violation. Schools must continue to follow New York State (NYS) [mandates](#) and should review New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) guidance, including the [Checklist for COVID-19 Practices for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K to Grade 12 Schools in New York City](#). Here is a summary of the Commissioner's Order requirements:

- Physical distancing:** Everyone on school premises must stay at least 6 feet apart at all times, except in emergencies or when doing so would create a safety hazard, **or** when physical barriers are put in place between people in accordance with NYS guidance for pre-K to grade 12 schools.
- Face coverings at all times:** Everyone must wear a face covering at all times on school premises and during all off-site school activities, except when people cannot wear a face covering because of developmental, medical or age reasons. Face coverings may be removed during snacks or meals when eating or drinking, during scheduled face covering breaks consistent with guidance issued by the NYC Health Department, and during naptimes.
- Coordinate with City contact tracing:** Schools must coordinate with the NYC Health Department and NYC Test & Trace Corps to identify, isolate and prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Reporting cases and school or classroom closures:** All nonpublic and charter schools must report every case of COVID-19 to the NYC Health Department by calling 866-692-3641 and cooperate with the NYC Health Department regarding closing and opening of classrooms or schools as necessary.

### **Frequently Asked Questions About the Commissioner's Order**

#### **Do students need to wear face coverings while outdoors during recess or while playing sports?**

Yes. Face coverings are required by students and staff at all times while on school property, including while outdoors during recess or playing sports. Face coverings are critical to stopping the spread of COVID-19. People can have COVID-19 and not know it, as many people do not have symptoms. When worn correctly (covering one's nose and mouth), face coverings can stop the spread of the virus to others.

School-sponsored organized sports occurring off school property must follow the [NYS Guidance for Sports and Recreation](#), which requires face coverings any time a player cannot maintain 6 feet of distance. Schools are encouraged to review the information on low-risk sports activities in the NYS guidance document.

**Do students younger than 5 need to wear a face covering?**

**Students in Article 49-licensed schools:** Children younger than 2 and children of any age who cannot wear a face covering because of medical or developmental reasons should not do so. All other children enrolled in an Article 49 pre-K through grade 12 program at a school must wear a face covering at all times, except during naptimes or when eating. Physical distance of at least 6 feet must be strictly maintained during such times.

**Students in Article 43-licensed preschool programs:** Students younger than 5 enrolled in school-based preschool programs are not required to wear a face covering while in the child care facility or in outdoor spaces exclusively used by the program. However, we strongly recommend that schools encourage use of face coverings by children between 2 and 5 years old.

**How should my school implement face covering breaks?**

Schools may allow students to remove their face coverings for mask breaks for brief periods of scheduled time. These mask breaks can be offered throughout the day at a school's discretion but must be planned. Frequency of mask breaks may vary by grade level. Mask breaks may not last for more than five minutes and can only occur outdoors or in well-ventilated areas. Students and staff must remain at least six feet apart while their face coverings are off. Barriers are not permitted in lieu of physical distancing when mask breaks are occurring.

**Can my school use barriers (such as plexiglass) instead of physical distancing?**

The NYC Health Department recommends against the use of barriers instead of physical distancing in schools. There is currently not enough evidence that barriers reduce the risk of transmission. The safest choice for your staff, students, families and our communities is to maintain strict physical distancing of 6 feet. The NYC Health Department strongly recommends schools adapt their physical spaces to accommodate 6 feet of distancing.

However, NYS allows schools to use barriers instead of physical distancing. If you choose to use barriers, please read and stay up-to-date on [NYS guidance](#) regarding approved materials for physical barriers.

**Who will need to be excluded from in-person instruction if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19?**

All staff and students identified as close contacts of a person who tested positive for COVID-19 must quarantine for 14 days from their last exposure. A close contact is any person who:

- Was within 6 feet for at least 10 minutes
- Shared a classroom
- Or spent more than 10 minutes in an enclosed space similar in size to a typical classroom with a person with COVID-19 during their infectious period, regardless of whether they were wearing a face covering or separated by barriers.

Students and staff may **not** return to school before the end of the quarantine period, even if they receive a negative COVID-19 test result. They must stay home for the full quarantine period as it is possible they have COVID-19 even though they tested negative. This is because the incubation period (the time between exposure and infection) for COVID-19 is two to 14 days.

### **What is the threshold for school closures due to cases of COVID-19?**

Schools must follow NYC Health Department recommendations for closing and reopening. School closings for nonpublic schools will be based on evidence of COVID-19 transmission in the school or community introductions of COVID-19 to the school that represents an exposure risk to the school community.

Factors that play a role in the decision to close include the number of cases over time and their distribution across grades and classrooms, the size of the school, the school's responsiveness to NYC Health Department inquiries, the school's ability to exclude people who need to isolate or quarantine in a timely manner and the school's adherence to opening guidelines.

### **Who should get tested for COVID-19 and why is testing important?**

All New Yorkers should get tested for COVID-19. COVID-19 is primarily spread through droplets that are sprayed when a person coughs, sneezes, sings, talks or breathes. Current evidence suggests COVID-19 most likely spreads to people who are in close contact (within 6 feet) with someone who has COVID-19.

It is important for New Yorkers to get tested as people without symptoms can spread the virus. Many New Yorkers, including older adults and those with certain underlying health conditions, are at [increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19](#). People at higher risk for severe COVID-19 may experience complications such as pneumonia, hospitalization or death.

Getting tested to stop the spread of COVID-19 is a small but important step all New Yorkers can take to protect themselves, their families, older adults in their community and their school community. The COVID-19 test is safe, confidential and offered at no cost in many locations.

Find a [testing site](#) near to you and take a step to protect yourself and your community.

**Note:** Some schools have testing requirements due to the [NYS Cluster Action Initiative](#). To find out more information about the cluster initiative, read [What You Need to Know About New York City's Localized Restrictions](#). To find out if your school is in a designated COVID-19 zone, use the [COVID-19 Look Up](#) tool.

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

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