

2021 Updated School Protocols



The revised West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) guidance incorporates updated practices supported by the state Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), state health leaders and the Centers for Disease Control. Children need to return to in-person instruction, and when mitigations are implemented and enforced, it is safe for them to do so. Heightened transmission rates experienced in communities are not reflected within the schools. In-person instruction will be implemented on a consistent basis across the state with the following mitigations in place. If limited, remote learning is required, essential student support services including meals, engagement for at-risk students and all special education services will continue.

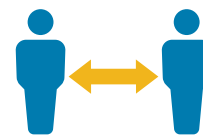
KEY MITIGATION STRATEGIES



Consistent and correct use of masks



Hand hygiene and coughing/sneezing etiquette



Social distancing to the largest extent



Eliminate large gatherings outside of classroom/core groups



Cleaning and disinfection



Contact tracing in collaboration with local health departments

Pre-K through Grade 8

Students will return to in-person instruction five days each week. A four-day a week in-person instruction model may be used with the fifth day reserved for teachers to engage with students enrolled in virtual platforms.

- » Data sources indicate limited transmission among middle school-age students and younger.
- » When all mitigations are implemented and enforced, incidents of virus spread decrease significantly.
- » Winter sports and extracurricular activities will not begin until after March 1, 2021.

Grades 9 through 12

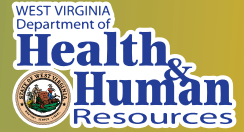
Students will attend in-person instruction as long as their county is not red on the DHHR Daily Map.

- » When counties turn red, affected high schools will suspend in-person instruction and begin remote learning the next school day. All school-related activities are suspended immediately.
- » When the county ceases to be red on the DHHR map, the county superintendent, in collaboration with the local health department, will determine when schools will return to in-person learning.
- » Data sources indicate students age 15 and above transmit the virus at higher rates than younger children.
- » Winter sports and extracurricular activities will not begin until after March 1, 2021.

Families have the option to keep their children in virtual learning, regardless of changes to in-person instruction.

Counties choosing remote learning contrary to DHHR and WVDE guidance place themselves in red. This results in the suspension of all in-person instruction, and extra-curricular and athletic activities.

The Case for In-Person Instruction



COVID-19 Knowledge Then vs. Now

When schools were moved to remote learning on March 13, 2020, little was known about protecting the general population against COVID-19. Schools, businesses and much of society closed down sending people home and isolated from one another.

Teachers relied on remote learning that included online lessons, virtual teaching, paper packets, phone calls and other types of outreach to keep students engaged. The challenges were formidable and included:

- » Inconsistent virtual and remote learning platforms.
- » Technology limitations led to unequal access to quality education based on families' socio-economic status, geographic location, and ability to assist students with assignments.
- » Inconsistent schedules for in-person learning adversely affect students especially the younger learners.

Schools are Safe

The state, much like the nation, has learned from past months of living with COVID-19. The most reliable lessons are from the data which tell a compelling story.

- » Schools do not reflect transmission rates occurring in the community.
- » Transmission rates in West Virginia schools during the first semester was .02 percent among students and .3 percent among teachers.
- » Schools are safer when key mitigations are enforced.

August – December 2020 COVID in Schools

- » 573 confirmed cases reported from 44 counties.
- » 68 outbreaks transmission in school setting.
- » 10 outbreaks among students' transmission occurred by bus, classroom, or associated extracurricular activities.
- » Median outbreak in schools: 4 cases.

- » National data confirms schools do not pose threat of spreading the virus.
- » Schools are among the safest places for children.
- » When schools close because of virus spread in the community, transmission rates often increase because teachers and students do not remain home. Instead, they move about the community and are exposed.

Impact of virtual, blended and remote instruction

- » Reliance on learning modalities outside of consistent in-person instruction jeopardizes student learning and endangers student well-being.
- » First semester of 2020: 1/3 of students received failing grades in at least one core subject area.
- » Virtual learning models are not conducive to learning for most students without consistent, live engagement from a teacher from students' own school.
- » DHHR reports reduction of child protective service referrals by an average of 50 - 54 percent per month because of the lack of in-person instruction.
- » Student social-emotional well-being suffers and exposure to trauma increases as a result of isolation caused by COVID and students being separated from the nurturing school environment.
- » Unequal access to equitable education because limited broadband statewide.
- » Kids Connect offers temporary relief but is not a long-term solution.
- » Schools are pillars of stability serving the needs of students, families and communities and offering ongoing interaction of at least one caring adult.
- » Students and communities relying on school-based health clinics miss well-child visits, scheduled vaccinations, and other healthcare benefits offered by the clinic.