



# CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

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August 30th, 2024

Dear Clay County Staff, Students, and Community,

The Clay County School System is operating normally for the 2024-2025 school year. Please note that this is subject to change as additional information about the spread and prevention of COVID-19 is known. In addition, directives may evolve as they are received from Governor Jim Justice, public health officials, and the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE). Therefore, all West Virginia County Boards of Education must be prepared to alter their guidance to comply with any new directives to best protect student health and learning needs. For our part, we will make sure staff, students and their families, and the community have access to the most current safe practices and guidance on our website.

We are working diligently to provide a caring, committed, and successful school year.

Respectfully,

Philip R. Dobbins  
Superintendent



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
BUREAU FOR PUBLIC HEALTH  
Commissioner's Office

Sherrri A. Young, DO, MBA, FAAFP  
Cabinet Secretary

Matthew Q. Christiansen, MD, MPH  
State Health Officer

**DATE:** March 18, 2024

**TO:** School Superintendents; School Principals; School Nurses

**FROM:** Shannon McBee, State Epidemiologist  
Bureau for Public Health

**RE:** Updated Respiratory Guidance for Schools

On March 1, 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated their COVID-19 guidelines to streamline recommendations for common respiratory viral illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). The updated recommendations continue to protect those at greatest risk for severe morbidity and mortality. While every respiratory virus does not act the same, adopting a unified approach makes recommendations easier to understand and more likely to be followed. Additionally, we know that many individuals with mild illness do not get tested, therefore they do not know which virus they have.

The updated guidance is applicable to schools across West Virginia and public health officials encourage schools to review and update their current policies and procedures as necessary. The following summarizes the updated guidance as it relates to schools.

- Students and staff who get sick with a respiratory illness should stay home and away from others.
- Students and staff may return to school and normal activities when symptoms have been getting better overall for 24 hours, and if fever was present, it has been gone for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
- Students should not be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities while they are home sick and potentially contagious.
- Once students or staff return to school; they are encouraged to take precautions for the next 5 days to curb disease spread within the school setting including: proper hand hygiene practices, wearing a mask, and keeping distance from others. These precautions are especially important to students and staff who may encounter individuals who are at risk for severe illness including those who are immunocompromised and those over 65 years of age and older.
- Schools are encouraged to continue to promote core respiratory prevention strategies in schools:



- Staying up to date with vaccination to protect students and staff against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.
- Practicing good hygiene by covering coughs and sneezes, washing, or sanitizing hands often, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces in the school often.
- Taking steps for cleaner air, such as bringing more fresh air outside, purifying indoor air, or offering outside classroom time as feasible.
- Schools are encouraged to monitor absenteeism as an early indicator for possible disease transmission within the school. Suspected or confirmed outbreaks of any etiology are immediately reportable to your local health department.
  - Acute respiratory illness outbreaks in an entire school are defined as increased school absenteeism (above 15% or otherwise determined baseline) associated with reported acute respiratory illness or influenza-like illness/laboratory confirmed respiratory pathogens).
  - Outbreak definitions in smaller settings like a single classroom, please see the full outbreak guideline at:  
[https://oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/Documents/ari/Healthy\\_Acute\\_Respiratory\\_Illness\\_Investigation\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/Documents/ari/Healthy_Acute_Respiratory_Illness_Investigation_Guidelines.pdf).
  - For additional guidance on infectious disease outbreaks in West Virginia, please visit: <https://oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/pages/default.aspx>.

While respiratory viruses remain a public health threat, we are in a different place from the beginning of the pandemic. We have more tools than ever before to combat COVID-19, influenza, and RSV including vaccines for all three major respiratory viruses. We are seeing far fewer hospitalizations and deaths associated with COVID-19 and population immunity is at a much higher degree due to vaccination, prior infection, or both.

The health and safety of students across West Virginia is very important, and we will continue to update you on any guidance developed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health. I wish you a happy and healthy spring and summer.

# FAQs for Outbreaks in Schools

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## **What is an outbreak and why must they be reported?**

An increase in the number of disease illnesses beyond what is expected for a specific area or time can indicate an outbreak. Quickly reporting and responding to these outbreaks will help to prevent further spread of the diseases.

## **Are schools required to report outbreaks?**

Yes, outbreaks in any setting are immediately reportable by law per the Reportable Disease Rule (64 CSR-7). All West Virginia schools (public and private) are required to report infectious disease outbreaks to their local health department.

## **What are the typical kinds of outbreaks that occur in schools?**

The two most common outbreaks are respiratory and/or gastrointestinal illnesses. The cause of an outbreak may be unknown but an increase in absenteeism with students/staff reporting similar symptoms should always be reported as an outbreak.

## **How do I know if there is an outbreak in my school?**

For school-wide illnesses, the baseline rate, or the "normal" absentee rate expected during a typical school year due to illness when there is no active outbreak, would need to be known. Any school absentee rate greater than the baseline rate (or 15% or more absenteeism when the baseline rate is unknown) can indicate an outbreak and should be reported.

- Calculate the school absentee rate by using,  $(\text{the total number of students absent for the day}) / (\text{the total number of students enrolled}) \times 100 = \text{current absentee rate}$ .

A call down should be completed to determine the potential cause of illness. See the [School Outbreak Resources webpage](#) for more information on how to perform a call down.

For small settings such as individual classroom, sports teams, activity groups, etc.

- Respiratory Illness (RSV, COVID, Influenza, etc.): Three or more epi-linked laboratory-confirmed (Rapid or PCR) cases identified within seven days OR five or more epi-linked cases of acute respiratory illness with no lab testing.
- Gastrointestinal Illness: Three or more epi-linked cases identified within a 24-hour period.

## **How do I report an outbreak?**

All outbreaks should be reported immediately to the local health department. If the local health department is unavailable, contact the state health department 24/7 on-call Epidemiologist at 304-558-5358.

# FAQs for Outbreaks in Schools

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## **What information is needed when reporting an outbreak?**

**School-wide outbreaks:** The outbreak can be monitored by student absenteeism and diagnosis/symptoms. Report total census information and the current absentee rate for students (see above for school absenteeism rate calculation for a school-wide outbreak).

**Small-setting outbreaks:** Schools should provide the name of the class/group, the number of ill students and staff, and the first illness onset date. In the case of sports teams or other extracurricular groups, dates of any contact with other school teams or groups should be reported as well.

## **What happens after I report an outbreak**

The local health department will provide outbreak guidance, including control measures and resources, to help control the spread of disease. Schools should provide weekly updates to their local health department. The local health department will determine when an outbreak meets criteria to close.

## **Do we need to close the school?**

Schools should stay open as long as they can maintain a safe environment and have adequate staff. A local health department may recommend temporarily closing the school if rapid and uncontrolled transmission occurs.

## **What can my school do to prevent outbreaks from happening?**

Just a few simple actions can greatly reduce the spread of diseases in schools.

- Routine cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys.
- Teach and reinforce proper handwashing.
- Teach and reinforce respiratory etiquette to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses.
- Promote vaccination and, if possible, facilitate vaccinations by hosting school-located vaccination clinics, or connect eligible children, students, teachers, staff, and families to off-site vaccination locations.

## **Where can I get more information?**

1. Preventing Spread of Infections in K-12 Schools. CDC Guidance.  
[www.cdc.gov/orr/school-preparedness/infection-prevention/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/orr/school-preparedness/infection-prevention/index.html)
2. School outbreak toolkits. WV Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services Guidance.  
[oeps.wv.gov/atoz/Pages/School-Outbreaks.aspx](http://oeps.wv.gov/atoz/Pages/School-Outbreaks.aspx)

# Updated Respiratory Guidance

March 2024

# DON'T FEEL WELL? STAY HOME

If you have the symptoms below,  
let your family and teachers know.



**COUGH**



**FEVER**



**SORE  
THROAT**



West Virginia DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

# KEY MITIGATIONS FOR SCHOOLS *(including extracurricular activities)*

These practices are important to guard against COVID-19, influenza, RSV, and the common cold.

***The most effective mitigation strategy is the vaccination for those eligible to receive it.***



**Cleaning and disinfecting**



**Hand hygiene and coughing/ sneezing etiquette**



**Monitor school absenteeism rates**

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## **When students or staff are sick with a respiratory illness:**

- » Students and staff who get sick should stay home and away from others.
- » Students are not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities while they are home sick and potentially contagious.
- » Students and staff may return to school if they:
  - › Are fever free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications)
  - › Have symptoms that are improving overall for 24 hours.
- » It is recommended that a mask be worn for 5 days upon return to school.