

**TOWNSHIP OF FRANKLIN PUBLIC
SCHOOL DISTRICT**



**2023-2024
ARP-ESSER III
SAFE RETURN PLAN**
(updated 9-2-23)

Mr. Troy Walton
Superintendent of Schools

Ms. Trish Birmingham
School Business Administrator

In July 2022, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Communicable Disease Service updated the COVID-19 K-12, Childcare and Youth Camp Guidance which will be posted to the Communicable Disease Service [COVID-19 Information for Schools](#) website.

To support and prioritize uninterrupted, full-time, in-person learning and care, NJDOH has moved from an individual case-based response strategy to a transmission mitigation strategy, where the risk of the whole school community, including the risk of interruptions to learning, is considered.

Key Updates include:

- COVID-19 layered prevention strategies are based on CDC community (by county) levels (low, medium and high) rather than the CALI. Current recommendations align with CDC's [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#).
- **Schools/ECE may transition away from a case-investigation response model to a routine disease control model in schools/ECE.** This model focuses more on the response to clusters of cases, outbreaks, and evidence of ongoing transmission in schools/ECE, and less on individual case investigation and contact tracing. This routine disease control model for COVID-19 more closely aligns NJDOH's COVID-19 mitigation efforts with public health response strategies used for other infectious diseases in schools/ECE.
- Removal of the language which recommended that siblings of students with COVID-19 compatible symptoms be excluded while waiting for test results for the symptomatic student.
- Recommendations for exclusion of household contacts who are not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination has **not** changed.

This document was developed as general guidance of how our district will handle COVID-19 situations. It is our hope that this will assist our students, staff, and parents/guardians in preparing for the return to school in the fall. **All of the strategies listed below will be in place when school begins in September, but are subject to change.** As usual, all school specific information, including bell schedules, classroom assignments, teacher information, etc. will be provided to parents via the annual summer mailing which is scheduled for late August.

I. Vaccinations

As a point of reference, all school-aged children are currently eligible to be vaccinated. In line with the NJDOH and CDC recommendations, we as a district recommend the COVID-19 vaccination, however, vaccinations are not mandatory and we certainly respect everyone's decision in regards to vaccinations. We do ask that you please keep the school nurses up to date with your child(ren) vaccination status.

II. Communication

Our district is committed to maintaining open lines of communication with staff, students, parents, and community members. The building principals will include COVID-19 information that includes case notification in the weekly updates. As a district, we have moved away from the use of the COVID Tracker website link.

III. Masks

As of March 7, 2022, masks were no longer required indoors or on school buses. Staff and students still have the option to wear a mask if they choose to. As always, we as a district will promote and respect individual masking decisions.

IV. Mask Breaks

If a staff member or student chooses to wear a mask indoors, they will have the flexibility to take a mask break whenever deemed necessary. This will be an individual decision and not monitored or managed in any way by district staff.

V. Social Distancing

The NJDOE guidance calls for school districts to maintain as much space as possible between students in classroom settings. Each classroom teacher will be given a copy of the NJDOE recommendations and will implement them to the extent possible given their classroom situation and individual teaching style. Outside of the classroom setting (common areas), social distancing will continue to be promoted to the extent possible. These common areas include hallways, foyers, gyms, cafeterias, and media centers.

VI. Hand Washing/Hygiene

Maintaining good personal hygiene habits, including washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes is one of the most important ways to mitigate the spread of germs and viruses. The district will continue to ensure each classroom will have tissues and hand sanitizers for use during the school day. As recommended, the promotion of proper hand washing and/or use of hand sanitizer will occur upon arrival at school, before and after lunches/recess, after using the restrooms, and after blowing nose/sneezes or coughing into tissues.

VII. Transportation/Buses

As previously stated, masks will no longer be required indoors or on school buses. Staff and students still will have the option to wear a mask if they choose to. The bus drivers are encouraged to open windows (even if just cracked) in efforts to increase the airflow while the students are on the bus. As in the past, the bus seats and other high touch areas will be wiped down in efforts to minimize the spreading of germs. Social distancing on the buses will be promoted to the best extent possible. Parents that provide daily transportation for their children should be reminded of the Board of Education's [Transportation Waiver Policy](#). This policy allows parents to waive transportation services and allows the district to provide a more efficient transportation service for our students.

VIII. Bathrooms and Water Fountains

Hallway and classroom bathrooms are accessible to students with cleaning and disinfecting occurring throughout the school day. **In an effort to minimize the opportunity for the spreading of germs and in consideration of the age of our students, hallway and classroom water fountains will not be accessible to the students. Hallway water fountains will be covered.** Students will be permitted to have water bottles while in school and will continue to be able to utilize water bottle refilling stations.

CLEANING, DISINFECTING, AND VENTILATION

I. Cleaning and Disinfection

The district will continue to adhere to existing facilities cleaning practices and procedures along with any new specific requirements of the Gloucester County or State of New Jersey Departments of Health as they arise.

The current cleaning and disinfection procedures include set cleaning/disinfection schedules, targeted areas to be cleaned, and methods and materials used to clean the school premises. Each school building is equipped with electrostatic sprayers that will be used daily.

Regular cleaning and disinfection will occur every day. As occurred last year, there will be more frequent cleaning and disinfection of shared objects, touched surfaces, and high transit areas, such as restrooms and common areas.

As routine cleaning and disinfecting will be done regularly (at least daily), additional cleaning measures will be implemented in the case of a COVID-19 outbreak.

II. Limiting Use of Shared Supplies and Equipment

The use of communal supplies will be limited to the best of the district's ability. Each school will provide a list of suggested school supplies necessary for individual student use for the school year.

III. Airflow and Ventilation

The district will continue to follow the air flow and ventilation procedures from the past two years. Each building is equipped with mobile air scrubbers that will be used on an as needed basis. School buildings are equipped with rooftop HVAC units, along with classroom unit ventilators and window A/C units that will deliver fresh air into the buildings. Rooftop exhaust fans are used to exhaust all air.

SCREENING, EXCLUSION, RESPONSE TO SYMPTOMATIC STUDENTS AND STAFF, CONTACT TRACING

I. Parental Screening/Keeping Sick Children Home

Parents/caregivers are strongly encouraged to monitor their children for signs of illness every day as they are the front line for assessing illness in their children.

Parents/caregivers are asked not to send their child to school if they present COVID-19 symptoms.

Symptoms could include any of the following:

- Fever of 100.4°F / 38°C or higher
- New or worsening cough
- Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Muscle pain or body aches
- Headache
- New taste or smell disorder
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

In addition, parents/guardians should keep their child(ren) home from school if they have:

- Tested positive (viral test) for COVID-19
- COVID-19 symptoms and awaiting COVID-19 test results

Any staff member exhibiting symptoms prior to the start of the school day will be advised to stay home. Staff members exhibiting symptoms during the school day will report to the nurse's office for further guidance.

For students or staff with chronic illness, only new symptoms or symptoms worse than baseline should be used to fulfill symptom-based exclusion criteria.

II. Response to Symptomatic Students and Staff

Schools will have procedures in place to identify and respond to a student or staff member who becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms.

- A designated area away from others to isolate individuals who become ill with or display symptoms of COVID-19.
- Upon isolating individuals who become ill with COVID-19 symptoms, the designated isolation area will allow for individuals to remain apart from others. School nurses will use Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions based on the care and tasks required.
- The school nurse will make contact with a parent/guardian in efforts to have the symptomatic child picked up from school.

III. Contact Tracing/Close Contacts

As previously stated, the NJDOH has moved from an individual case-based response strategy to a transmission mitigation strategy, where the risk of the whole school community, including the risk of interruptions to learning, is considered. **School districts are no longer required to conduct contact tracing and close contacts will no longer be identified.**

IV. Exclusion Timetables

The district will use the [COVID-19 Exclusion Table](#) as described in NJDOH guidance for the local health department to determine the need for and duration of school exclusion based on the level of COVID-19 community transmission in their region.

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has provided school districts with updated quarantine guidance that is in line with the Center for Disease Control's recommendations. The quarantine timelines are listed below.

Scenario	Quarantine Timeframe
Positive for COVID w/Symptoms -Staff or student that tests positive for COVID-19 and are symptomatic	Quarantine for 5 full days from the date that symptoms began (Day 0 is the first day of symptoms). Return to school on Day 6, as long as the individual has been fever-free for 24 hours and other symptoms have improved. Individuals that test positive for COVID are encouraged to wear a mask on days 6-10 upon the return to school.
Positive for COVID w/o Symptoms Staff or student that tests positive for COVID-19 and are asymptomatic	Quarantine for 5 full days from date that the test was administered (Day 0 is the test date). If symptoms develop, the 5 day quarantine period would start over beginning the date that the symptoms began.

<u>Symptomatic (Sick) Individual that Received an Alternate Diagnosis</u>	An individual that has received an alternate diagnosis (ex. strep throat, flu, etc.) may return to school with physician’s documentation of alternate diagnosis. The individual should follow the NJDOH School Exclusion List when determining return to school timeframe.
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VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION

I. Virtual Instruction

Our school district may be confronted with the incidence of COVID-19 positive cases amongst staff and/or students that require exclusion of students. While the school itself will remain open for in-person instruction, we will offer virtual or remote instruction to those students impacted with COVID-19 situations (positive cases based on clinical lab results and/or the need to quarantine). Parents will be required to communicate with their child’s teachers and the school in the event that they are unable to attend school due to COVID-19 illness.

II. Student Attendance

School district policies for attendance and instructional time exist and can be found on the district website. Teachers will take attendance via Realtime for students that are attending school in-person. If a child is in medical quarantine the virtual student attendance will be based on Google Meet check-ins to be completed by the end of the school day and recorded in Realtime. As long as the student participates in the Google Meet check-ins and/or live stream, the student will be marked as present for that particular school day.

III. Field Trips

The Township of Franklin School District resumed field trips during the 2022-23 school year and will continue to plans for field trips moving forward.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Any questions regarding the opening of the schools for the fall of 2023 can be directed to the respective building principal or supervisor, or send an email to:

reopening@franklintwpschools.org