

July 27, 2020

## GUIDANCE FOR CAMDEN COUNTY SCHOOL REOPENINGS

Dear School Administrator(s):

As we progress through the uncertainties surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it has on our everyday lives, we are working hard to make sure that schools have guidance to support in-person instruction and provide a safe learning environment in each jurisdiction. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the governor, through an executive order, halted in-person instruction to protect New Jersey from the spread of Covid-19. In June 2020, the New Jersey Department of Education provided guidance, "The Road Back, Restart and Recovery Plan for Education" The plan provided anticipated minimum standards that will ensure health and safety in each school. The Camden County Department of Health is here to help each school district develop its plan that best fits the district's local needs. This is an enormous and complex task that needs sustained and meaningful partnerships between school districts, the county office of education, the health department, and all parties that interact with the school district. Regardless of how NJDOE guidance might vary with local school district policies, all policies will be centered on the health and safety of students and staff. While health and safety considerations are paramount, the guidance also is rooted in our understanding and belief that social interaction and in-person instruction is essential to our children's emotional well-being, as well as their educational growth and advancement.

The school reopening plans and policies should be guided by supporting the overall health and well-being of all children, adolescents, their families, and their communities. School policies should be practical, feasible, and appropriate for the child and adolescent development. It is critically important to develop strategies that can be revised and adapted depending on the level of viral transmission in the school and throughout the community. This should be done with close communication with state and local health authorities and recognizing the differences between school districts, including urban, suburban, and rural districts. School policies must be flexible and agile in responding to new information, and administrators must be willing to refine approaches in collaboration with the local health department when specific policies are not working. Special considerations and accommodations should be made to account for the diversity of youth, especially for vulnerable populations, including

those who are medically fragile, live in poverty, have developmental challenges, or have special health care needs or disabilities, with the goal of safe return to school.

In the area of health and safety, the Restart and Recovery Plan highlights the following:

- The development of policies and procedures for screening students/staff/visitors as they enter the building;
- The development of procedures for social distancing in the school building where appropriate;
- The development of procedures for disinfecting/cleaning;
- The development of policies and procedures for wearing face coverings; and
- The development of policies and procedures for students/staff on school buses.

To support the requirements/recommendations in the Restart and Recovery Plan, the county health department recommends that districts take the following precautions as they plan to reopen schools.

**Screening of staff upon entering the building:** School districts may choose to allow employees to perform a symptom screen on themselves before leaving for work and will stay home if ill. [Note: District policies should reflect the process for accommodating self-quarantining]. School staff are required to wear face masks/cover before entering the school building unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health. *If staff indicate that they can not wear a mask, they must provide a doctor's note to school administration.* Six feet of social distancing must be maintained when no mask/cover is worn.

**Screening of visitors upon entering the building:** Temperature screening must be required upon entrance to the school for any visitor to the school. Visitors will go through temperature checks and health assessment screening when entering school buildings in the lobby or reception area. A list of symptoms must be posted for visitors to review (such as fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, loss of taste or smell, vomiting or diarrhea, and/or sore throat). A no-touch thermometer must also be used to take visitor's temperature, along with wipes for disinfecting before and after use, and hand sanitizer for visitor usage. If the temperature reading is at or slightly above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (100.4F), but the visitor believes there is a non-illness related reason for the elevated temperature, such as waiting outside on a warm day or in a warm car or walking a significant distance to get to the location, the visitor may wait a few minutes and take another reading. If a visitor has any of the listed symptoms (not solely related to seasonal allergies) or a temperature that remains at or above 100.4F, access must be denied to the building.

*Visitors are required to wear face masks/covers before entering the building unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health, or the individual is under two years of age. If visitors can not wear a*

mask, they must provide a doctor's note to school administration. Six feet of social distancing must always be maintained when no mask/cover is worn.

**Screening of students before entering the building:** Staff must visually check students for symptoms upon arrival and/or confirm with families that students are free of COVID-19 symptoms (information regarding “look for’s” will be provided in a subsequent toolkit provided by the health department). Health checks must be conducted safely and respectfully and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations. School districts may choose to perform symptom screening before children arrive at school by having a parent/guardian conduct screening at home each morning before the school day and report to the school if there are any symptoms. No children with symptoms should be sent on a bus or brought to school. [Note: Districts need to provide parents with a symptoms checklist before the start of the school year].

**Screening of students before entering school buses:** School districts may choose to perform symptom screening before children get on the bus by having a parent/guardian conduct screening at home each morning before the school day and report to the school if there are any symptoms. **No children with symptoms should be sent on a bus.** [Note: Districts need to provide parents with a symptoms checklist before the start of the school year].

Buses can operate with a maximum of two students per seat, with the understanding that masks/covers will be required of students while on the bus. Bus drivers are required to wear face shields and/or masks/covers when students enter/exit the bus. CDC does not recommend the use of face shields for everyday activities or as a substitute for a cloth face mask/cover. *The bus company shall be required to disinfect all high-touch surfaces on buses at least twice daily once in the morning after transport and once in the afternoon after the daily run.*

**Wearing of masks/covers:** Students must be required to wear masks/covers while on the school bus and while in common areas inside the school when social distancing if at least six feet is not possible. Extended usage of masks/covers often leads to discomfort, distraction, or mishandling/misuse, triggering a child to touch their face more frequently and causing contamination and/or rendering the mask ineffective. It is necessary to acknowledge that the use of masks/covers may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities. Masks/covers also make it difficult to speak or ask questions in a classroom setting. To this point, students will be allowed to remove the masks/covers when in the classroom when maintaining a social distance of at least six feet. If students cannot wear a mask, they must provide a doctor's note. However, six feet of social distancing must be maintained when no mask/cover is worn.

**Social Distancing:** To allow for social distancing within the classroom to the maximum extent practicable, students should be seated at least 6 feet apart while considering the flow of student traffic around the room. When the weather allows, windows should be open to allow greater air circulation. If schools are not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications should be in place. These include using physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction or having students sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart. Classrooms and common areas should be ventilated with an additional circulation of outdoor air when possible, using windows, doors, and/or fans. High-traffic hallway use will be limited when feasible, by either staggering the end of classroom periods to reduce the number of students in the hallways simultaneously and/or by requiring masking.

In cafeterias, when feasible, individuals should be seated in staggered arrangements to avoid “across-the-table” seating. Individuals must sanitize or wash their hands before and after eating. Consider using assigned seating for students in cafeterias and other congregate settings to help assist with contact tracing when required by the health department. The Camden County Department of Health will support the school district food service departments with training in best practices for food service and safety.

**Operational Protocols/Procedures.** The following considerations should be made when addressing protocols/procedures for maintaining health and safety:

- Students and staff must consistently be made aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. It is essential to have posters with signs and symptoms posted in each classroom and continuously updated (dissemination of resources will be coordinated with the county office of education).
- Students and staff must go to the nurse immediately if feeling symptomatic.
- Each school must provide an isolation room to hold student or staff who are symptomatic before they exit the school.

**Cleaning/Disinfecting.** All high-contact surfaces must be disinfected regularly, including door handles, light switches, playground equipment, and student desks. Additionally, the following precautions should be considered:

- All individuals in school should sanitize or wash their hands frequently. Hand sanitizer should be made available in all common areas, hallways, and/or in classrooms where sinks for handwashing are not available.
- The use of shared objects should be limited when possible or cleaned between use.
- Students and staff should be encouraged to use individual water bottles from home or disposable plastic bottles.

**Reporting of confirmed cases/contact tracing:** School administrators or designee should notify the Camden County Department of Health about positive COVID-19 cases related to a school. All positive cases of COVID-19 in Camden County will be electronically reported through the state portal to the Camden County Health Department to commence contact tracing and case investigation. During contact tracing, if the health department identifies a positive person with contacts in any school district which has not been reported by the school administrator, the health department will notify the school administrator or his/her designee. The Camden County Department of Health will take the lead on contact tracing, isolation/quarantining of ill students and staff, and any further actions needed to contain the spread of COVID-19. The School district *does not have to do contact tracing of positive cases related to the school*. However, the school administration will be contacted during the contact tracing procedure for information regarding a case. Each school will have to keep records of students, including cohorts, that the health department will require during contact tracing. **The Camden County Health Department will handle all contact tracing and have staff available to perform contact tracing and case investigation with the information provided by the school.**

Notification of a positive case to the Camden County Department of Health by school administrators or designee can be through our COVID hotline **1800-999-9045** or [schools.covid@camdencounty.com](mailto:schools.covid@camdencounty.com)

Throughout both the school reopening and any interscholastic athletic programs starting before that time, the Camden County Department of Health will remain your full and committed partner to navigate any changes to this situation and to make adjustments to the plans if needed. We will closely work with the Camden County Office of Education to keep you informed as we strive to minimize the overall effects of COVID-19, the health and safety of the entire school community in Camden county.

This guidance can change with new information and recommendations from federal and state health agencies. For questions related directly to your school district, please contact the Camden County Department of Health at 856-374-6037. There will be a tool kit file for resources associated with this guidance, which is made available to the school superintendents and further shared with each school in Camden County. For general questions regarding health and safety guidance, please contact the county office of education to ensure coordinated dissemination of information.



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