



July 30, 2021

## HCPSS Health and Safety Updates for 2021-2022 School Year

Howard County Public School System Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano today outlined several health and safety updates for the 2021-2022 school year, including that, effective immediately, **masks will be required in school buildings for all students, staff and visitors**, regardless of vaccination status. This decision comes after new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Howard County Health Department, all of which strongly endorse universal indoor masking.

Masks also will be required while on school buses. Masks will not be required for any students or staff while eating/drinking indoors. Masks will not be required outdoors, however they are recommended for unvaccinated individuals.

"This is not a decision I made lightly. Getting our students back to school in person is a top priority," said Martirano. "We recognize in this case that 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' I know not everyone is comfortable in a mask and appreciate our community's cooperation as we continue to fight this pandemic."

"The health and safety of our staff and students is of utmost concern," he continued. "There is a rise in COVID-19 cases and we have a significant portion of students who are not yet eligible for the vaccine, which necessitates layering mitigation strategies. The use of face masks has proven to be an effective measure at preventing the spread of COVID-19 and universal indoor masking will aid in allowing us to keep schools open."

HCPSS continues to carefully evaluate several considerations when making decisions, including guidance and recommendations from health professionals and experts at the CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Department of Health, and Howard County Health Department; and stakeholder feedback, including emails/phone calls from parents, students and staff.

In addition to universal indoor masking in school buildings, HCPSS will continue its process of ensuring readiness, reviewing protocols and ongoing monitoring of several items, including:

- **Student Meals:** Meals will be provided at no cost to students, and will be served and eaten in cafeterias. Elementary school students will have an assigned seating chart in order to provide data should a close contact situation arise.
- **PPE Supplies:**
  - HCPSS will maintain an inventory of PPE supplies, including face masks and disinfectant wipes, for student and staff needs.
  - Hand sanitizer stations will remain in place throughout school buildings.
- **Additional Care:**
  - Plexiglass currently in place will remain.
  - Health Rooms will continue to have a designated isolation area.
  - General cleaning and disinfecting will be conducted throughout school buildings, in compliance with CDC guidelines.

- **Air Quality (HVAC):**
  - [Preventative maintenance of HVAC units is ongoing.](#)
  - Before the start of the school year, HCPSS will have replaced 12,439 air filters in the HVAC units serving all HCPSS buildings. In some cases, HVAC units are equipped with two air filter tracks, one for a prefilter and one for a final filter. In these cases, MERV 8 air filters were installed in the prefilter position and MERV 13 air filters were installed in the final filter position. If there was only one air filter track in the airstream (i.e., there was no prefilter), MERV 13 air filters were installed.
  - During summer 2021, HCPSS staff and outside contractors checked the operation of outdoor air dampers and airside economizers for more than 900 HVAC units in all HCPSS buildings. Deficiencies were identified and addressed at the time or were noted for follow-up work, which will be completed prior to students returning August 30.
  - HCPSS staff have or are in the process of checking the operation of more than 900 exhaust fans in all HCPSS buildings. Minor deficiencies were identified and immediately addressed; other deficiencies were noted for follow-up work, which will be completed prior to students returning August 30.
- **Screenings for Illness:** HCPSS will continue its process of self-diagnostic screenings. Parents/guardians also are reminded to conduct health checks each day before their children leave home. [Details on health checks and when students should stay home](#) can be found online.
- **COVID-19 Testing:** HCPSS will continue to offer a [voluntary K-12 COVID-19 Testing Program](#) that will provide free COVID-19 tests for students and school-based staff who develop COVID-like symptoms or are identified as close contacts while they are in a school building.
- **COVID-19 Dashboard:** HCPSS will continue to [publicly provide the number of positive test results](#) self-reported to HCPSS of students, staff or visitors in school/office buildings during their contagious period.

Superintendent Martirano will provide an update on health and safety measures during the Board of Education meeting, Thursday, August 12.

Information related to the 2021-2022 school year can be found online at <https://www.hcpss.org/2021-2022/>. Answers to many frequently asked questions are available online at <https://help.hcpss.org/>. Both sites are being continually updated as new information becomes available.