


Memorandum

TO: Yellowstone County School Superintendents

FROM: John Felton, MPH, MBA, FACHE
President & CEO / Health Officer 

Date: May 26, 2021

Subject: Guidance for school operations, AY2021-2022

In response to several questions regarding guidance for the next academic year, RiverStone Health has developed the following guiding principles. Please recognize that by the time school starts in the fall, there might be new guidance. Also, please recall that what we are offering is guidance and not requirements or restrictions. These principles do not and should not be construed to override the decisions of local school boards as you plan for returning to school next year.

Yellowstone City-County Health Department, dba RiverStone Health, follows state and Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on mitigating the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19. Multiple layers of prevention, from the personal/family level to the level of school-based facilities and activities, will decrease risk and facilitate safer in-person education, enhancing health and resilience for students, faculty, staff, families, and the community. RiverStone Health is committed to assisting school districts in mitigating infectious disease risks so as to maximize student ability to be in-person in the classroom where students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs are most likely to be monitored and met; as health equity is central to our mission we are especially concerned that the needs of children with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, and those who often change schools have a safe and supportive environment associated with on-site education.

Pulling the high points from the May 15, 2021 *Operational Strategy for k-12 Schools Through Phased Prevention*, we are recommending that Yellowstone County schools:

1. Encourage SARS-CoV-2 vaccination for all staff, faculty, and students across all age groups allowed. This is the single most important, as well as safest and fastest, strategy to decrease morbidity and mortality and slow the evolution of new variants. Also important to school districts is that encouraging vaccination does not cost any school funds or decrease teaching time. RiverStone Health is very open to working with schools to schedule and operate school-based vaccination clinics for eligible staff and students.
2. Improve ventilation to maximize outdoor air coming into buildings, increase filtration, and diluting potential contaminants. Enhanced ventilation is a far-reaching strategy that will have beneficial effects beyond reducing the spread of COVID-19.

3. Within the classroom setting, encourage desktops and high touch surfaces are sanitized daily. This can be accomplished as a team effort between students and staff/faculty.

Students' desks/tables should, to the extent possible, be positioned with 3' distance between students facing in the same direction to decrease one student breathing directly into the face of another.

Faculty, whenever possible, should stay 6' away from students to decrease the risk of transmission of respiratory droplets.

Sanitizer should be available in all classrooms, especially those without sinks.

4. If communal water systems have been shut down, they need to be properly flushed before being made available for regular use. Environmental Health Services at RiverStone Health can provide guidance if needed to decrease the potential for exposure to lead, copper and *Legionella* bacteria.
5. It is recommended to avoid, to the extent possible, self-service food options; hand sanitizer should be readily available when food is present.
6. When activities involving more forceful exhalation such as singing, playing instruments, or physical activity/sports are occurring, they should to the extent possible be scheduled in places with high ventilation and/or large spaces such as outdoors or gymnasiums with 6' physical distancing.
7. Encourage mask use and open windows on school buses with high occupancy.
8. Use the resources at: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/FINAL-0321420 B K-12 Mitigation Toolkit508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/FINAL-0321420_B_K-12_Mitigation_Toolkit508.pdf)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>

Thank you.