

BACK TO SCHOOL

Fall 2021 Handbook

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Rockford Public Schools is following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Illinois Department of Public Health, Winnebago County Health Department, Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois governor's office to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

At this time, remote-only instruction will not be provided in the 2021-22 school year.

State, federal and local leaders agree that in-person instruction for all students is a priority. According to the [Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Department of Public Health](#), "In-person learning with the appropriate protective measures should be both safe and essential to students' mental health and academic growth. ... The majority of students need full-time in-person access to their teachers and support network at school to stay engaged, to learn effectively, and to maintain social-emotional wellness."

The back-to-school plans in this handbook include several COVID-19 prevention strategies to continue to provide in-person instruction for all students and keep our staff, students and families safe:

- Encouraging the COVID-19 vaccine for all eligible staff, students and families
- Following the mandate from Gov. JB Pritzker to require masks indoors at all schools. Masks are especially important for people who are not fully vaccinated and are unable to physically spread out.
- Testing for COVID-19
- Keeping students in small groups, or cohorts
- Increasing and/or improving ventilation
- Encouraging students and staff to thoroughly and frequently wash their hands and practice good hygiene
- Covering coughs and sneezes
- Encouraging staff and students to stay home when they're sick or not feeling well
- Enforcing routine and special cleaning and sanitization to help reduce the spread of germs

THE COVID-19 VACCINE

The COVID-19 vaccine is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic, so all RPS 205 students, staff and families who are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine are encouraged to take advantage of it ahead of the upcoming school year. The vaccine is the best defense we have against COVID-19, the virus variants and further interruptions and distractions for our students.

The higher our student and staff vaccination rate, the lower the chance of closures, cancellations and interruptions for the upcoming school year. The Winnebago County Health Department has shared a goal for all schools to have 70 percent of their population – including students and staff – vaccinated against COVID-19 to significantly lower the risk of community spread.

People who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are at a lower risk of symptomatic or severe infection. According to the CDC, people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are less likely to have an asymptomatic infection or transmit COVID-19 to others than people who are not fully vaccinated.

RPS 205 has launched a vaccine incentive program to encourage eligible students to receive the COVID-19 vaccine:

<https://www.rps205.com/205vibe/205-vibe-news/default-post-page-clone-clone-clone/~board/news/post/rps-205-launches-vaccine-incentive-program>

The vaccine is not required for students or staff to return to school. Not all eligible students will take advantage of the vaccine. Students will not be punished for their vaccination status.

VACCINATION STATUS

School officials can request proof of vaccination records to verify a student's vaccination status, if needed. School health officials can also review I-CARE, or Illinois Comprehensive Automated Immunization Registry Exchange, the statewide immunization database, to review a student's immunization records. Collecting that information will comply with all relevant requirements – including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA.

MASKS

RPS 205 is following the mandate from Gov. JB Pritzker and will require all students and staff to wear a mask indoors. Masks must completely cover the nose and mouth, regardless of a person's vaccination status. We're following this mandate for several reasons:

- Not all RPS 205 students are eligible for the vaccine because they are younger than 12.
- The RPS 205 vaccination rate among students and our community is low.
- Winnebago County currently has an increasing, substantial or high COVID-19 transmission rate, according to the Winnebago County Health Department. That includes the COVID-19 Delta variant, which is spread more easily among children and young adults.
- Enforcing a mask policy that only applies to unvaccinated students is difficult to effectively monitor and enforce.

MASK EXCEPTIONS

The following staff or students will not be required to wear a mask:

- A person who cannot wear a mask or cannot safely wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- A person for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty as determined by the relevant workplace safety guidelines or federal regulations.

Masks may be removed in the following limited circumstances:

- For children (Early Childhood students, for example) while they are napping.
- For staff when alone in classrooms or offices with the door closed.
- For individuals who are younger than 2.
- For individuals who have trouble breathing; or those who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face mask without assistance.
- For a person with a disability who cannot wear a mask or cannot safely wear a mask because of the disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

- For staff and students when they are outdoors. However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission, staff and students who are not fully vaccinated should wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

Staff and students who remove their face mask in these limited situations – or situations allowed by the CDC or the Illinois Department of Public Health – should maintain physical distancing whenever possible.

Individuals who have a condition or medical contraindication that prevents them from wearing a face mask are required to provide documentation from a health care provider. A face shield may be more appropriate, however physical distancing should be enforced.

Students with an Individualized Education Program or 504 Plan who are unable to wear a face mask or face shield due to a medical contraindication may not be denied access to an in-person education if the school is offering in-person education to other students. Staff working with students who are unable to wear a face mask or shield due to a medical contraindication should wear approved and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) based on job-specific duties and risks and maintain physical distancing as much as possible.

Mask compliance: Students must comply with the mask mandate and requirements. Failure to comply will result in appropriate disciplinary action according to the Student Code of Conduct. Repeated failure to comply will result in progressive discipline.

BREAKFAST & LUNCH

Students may remove their masks while eating breakfast and lunch. Physical distancing of at least three feet is recommended when eating or drinking. Staff are encouraged to eat alone where possible, preferably in an area where the door to the room can be closed while their mask is off.

FACE SHIELDS

Face shields may only be used as a substitute for face masks in limited circumstances, because they're not as effective as an appropriately worn mask. Face shields have gaps in the sides and bottom where respiratory droplets may not be contained. Physical distancing must be enforced when face shields are worn. **Face shields could be considered in the following situations:**

- Individuals who are younger than 2.
- Individuals who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face mask without assistance.
- Students and staff who provide a health care provider's note as documentation that they have a medical condition where the medical provider advises against wearing a mask.
- Teachers who demonstrate facial expressions where it is important for students to see how a teacher pronounces words (e.g., English Learners, early childhood, world language, etc.).
- Teachers will maintain social distancing from students while wearing a face shield and resume mask wearing when distancing is not possible and after the instruction component requiring a face shield has concluded.

TRANSPORTATION: MASKS REQUIRED ON SCHOOL BUSES

Students and staff will be required to wear a mask that completely covers their nose and mouth while on a school bus. There is no COVID-19 capacity limit for bus passengers. Bus drivers can encourage passengers to open windows to improve fresh air circulation.

Reminder: Families with students who do NOT plan to ride the bus next school year should contact the Transportation Department so they can be removed from a bus route: BUS@rps205.com or 815-966-3705. Bus seating is limited, and space should be reserved for families who need the service.

QUARANTINE & ISOLATION

Staff and students will be isolated away from school or work if they test positive for COVID-19 or if they have any of the following COVID-19 symptoms: Fever (100.4°F or higher), new onset of moderate to severe headache, shortness of breath, new cough, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, new loss of sense of taste or smell, fatigue from unknown cause, muscle or body aches from unknown cause. Students will be assigned to a special purpose room – specifically set aside for symptomatic students – until they're able to be picked up from school.

Unvaccinated close contacts at school will be offered the Test-To-Stay option, outlined later in this handbook, and may not have to quarantine.

Vaccinated students and staff must closely monitor for any potential COVID-19 symptoms.

Students and staff who are fully vaccinated with no COVID-19-like symptoms do not need to quarantine or be restricted from school or extracurricular activities. The CDC recommends that fully vaccinated individuals test three-to-five days after a close contact exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

QUARANTINE & ISOLATION: TEACHING & LEARNING

Isolation: Students directed to stay away from school because of **isolation** and a positive COVID-19 test will be required to make up missed assignments and classwork. An absence because of quarantine or isolation will be treated as an absence for an illness.

Quarantine: Students directed to stay away from school because of quarantine – being a close contact to a positive COVID-19 case – should continue to participate in the required five hours of school work each day. Teachers and staff will work with students to provide lessons through paper copies or shared online so students can independently work from home. Students will not be required to join live remote instruction during quarantine.

In either event of isolation or quarantine, teachers and staff will continue communicating coursework and feedback to students through Seesaw, Google Classroom, and/or Schoology portals.

QUARANTINE GUIDANCE

When a staff member or student tests positive for COVID-19, the district's health services team will identify any close contacts through contact tracing. Contact tracing involves identifying people who have a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 – and the people they were close to when they were potentially contagious. RPS 205 and the Winnebago County Health Department will work with those staff and students to interrupt the virus spread.

The CDC defines a **close contact** in an indoor classroom setting as a person who is:

- not fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and
- was within three feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.

This CDC guidance is new this school year, and it means students and staff in an indoor classroom setting are not automatically considered close contacts. Only students within three feet would be required to quarantine away from school or work.

If a person is fully vaccinated and also correctly wearing a mask, that person does not need to quarantine, as long as they are not showing any COVID-19 symptoms. Please note that the Winnebago County Health Department is the final authority on identifying close contacts.

Regardless of when quarantine ends, continue to monitor for symptoms through the full two weeks – or 14 days – after the exposure. Continue to wear a mask, avoid crowds and people who are ill, practice good hand hygiene and physical distancing, and cleaning and disinfection. If any COVID-19 symptoms develop during or after quarantine, immediately isolate and contact the Winnebago County Health Department or primary care physician. The Health Department can share information about how to safely quarantine and isolate at home.

More about close contacts: The longer a person is exposed to a person infected with COVID-19, the higher the risk of transmission – or getting infected or catching the virus. The infectious period begins two days before symptoms start – or, for a person who tests positive for COVID-19 but does not have any symptoms, the infectious period starts two days before the positive sample was taken.

People who are exposed to someone with a confirmed case – but outdoors – are generally not considered close contacts.

Siblings: According to guidance from the Winnebago County Health Department, a symptomatic student's siblings might also be required to isolate away from school until the sibling has a negative test result.

Regardless of when a person ends quarantine, continue to monitor for COVID-19 symptoms two weeks after the exposure. If any symptoms develop during or after quarantine, the person should immediately isolate away from others and contact the Winnebago County Health Department or local healthcare provider to report their symptoms.

TEST-TO-STAY PROTOCOL

The Illinois Department of Public Health is allowing close contacts who are not vaccinated to modify their quarantine through a test-to-stay protocol. Rockford Public Schools plans to pilot this protocol and prioritize students in the classroom over extracurricular activities. **The Winnebago County Health Department will make the final decision on quarantine details.**

If someone has an exposure to COVID-19 – aside from someone within their household – close contacts are allowed to stay in school as long as they continue to test negative for COVID-19 on days one, three, five and seven from the initial date they were exposed to someone with COVID-19. The negative test results must be from a PCR or rapid Emergency Use Authorization-approved test. All test results must be negative to remain at school or work.

This test-to-stay protocol can only be used when both the COVID-19-positive person and the close contact consistently and correctly wore masks, regardless of their vaccination status.

Unvaccinated close contacts who do not participate in testing must quarantine for at least eight days and have a negative test result on or after day five.

Students and staff can continue to participate in extracurricular activities when they are engaged in test-to-stay protocol, regardless of their vaccination status. If at any time the student or staff person who is not fully vaccinated tests positive or has COVID-19 symptoms, they should be immediately isolated and sent home.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- In schools, staff and students should maintain at least three feet of physical distance in the classroom whenever possible.
- In cafeterias, physical distance should be maximized when students are moving through the food service line and while eating. This is especially important when dining indoors. When possible, students and staff should use spaces outside the cafeteria for dining to help with distancing.
- Students, teachers and staff who are fully vaccinated do not need to distance while eating.
- When possible, schedules will be staggered, to lessen the number of students entering and exiting the cafeteria, hallways and common areas.
- Staff and students should abstain from physical contact, such as handshakes, high fives and hugs.

Physical distancing provides protection, minimizes risk of exposure, and limits the number of close contacts. The CDC recommends schools maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk, but schools should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement. RPS 205 administrators and staff will provide for the maximum space possible between students – and between students and staff – within each school’s physical capabilities, according to the recommendations.

CLEANING PROCEDURES

Rockford Public Schools has established increased cleaning and disinfection protocols at all district buildings that align with the CDC and Winnebago County Health Department recommendations.

The district is using disinfectants that are proven effective and registered with the EPA. Those chemicals also comply with the district’s safety standards.

Increased cleaning and disinfection protocols include four categories:

Daily Cleaning: Performed each day by the district's cleaning contractor, including trash removal, spot cleaning of vertical surfaces, disinfecting wipe of horizontal surfaces and high touch objects, spot cleaning of floors and room inspections.

Weekly Cleaning: Weekly cleaning is performed by the district's cleaning contractor and includes trash removal, spot cleaning of vertical surfaces, wiping of surfaces and high-touch objects with disinfecting wipes, full cleaning of floors, high/low dusting, and room inspections.

Supplemental Cleaning: Supplemental cleaning has been performed on a daily basis since the pandemic started. It's done in addition to routine and weekly cleaning and goes over and above what's considered routine. Supplemental cleaning is focused on cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces (e.g. handrails, drinking fountains, door handle push bars leading to common areas) specifically for the purpose of preventing spread of disease. This includes disinfecting high-touch areas in the morning and again in the early afternoon. After-school cleaning includes building-wide disinfection and deep cleaning each night.

Emergency cleaning in case of a suspected or reported case of illness: In addition to routine, weekly and supplemental cleaning, emergency cleaning will happen when a suspected or reported case of illness has been identified in a classroom or building. This will include cleaning and disinfection of all touchable surfaces with a reduced dwell time disinfectant; windows will be opened to increase circulation or HVAC will be configured to increase air turnover.

Please note:

- All classrooms are subject to routine, weekly and supplemental cleaning.
- Early childhood and special education classrooms are subject to special case cleaning, in addition to routine, weekly and supplemental cleaning.
- Areas used for after-school programs will be subject to the same routine and supplemental cleaning procedures as regular-use classrooms.
- Special education bathrooms will be cleaned every two hours.
- Early Childhood classrooms will be electrostatically disinfected between the morning class and afternoon class.

- Cleaning in the evening will focus on building-wide disinfection and deep cleaning, especially in areas where access is limited during the day

Routine High-Touch Cleaning Includes:

- Restroom stalls and dispensers
- Toilets, sinks and faucets
- Cafeteria tables
- Drinking fountains
- Student desks, light fixtures and door handles/push plates

Supplemental High-Touch Daily Cleaning Includes:

- Door handles and knobs/push plates to common areas (including exterior)
 - Handrails
 - Student locker handles
 - Refrigerator handles
 - Microwave handles
 - Library tables

Cleaning chemicals and solutions include:

- Bioeques Botanical Disinfectant Solutions
- PathoSans-PathoCide All purpose Sanitizer- Disinfectant
- Clorox Commercial Cleaning Solutions, Clorox Total 360 Disinfectant wipes
- Oxivir TB Wipes, U.S. EPA # 70627-60

CLASSROOM CLEANING AND SANITATION SUPPLIES

Every classroom will be provided with:

- Spray bottles with EPA approved disinfectant
- Paper towels
- Hand sanitizer

Teachers and staff may request refills of these materials at any time from school administration.

SCHOOL SPECIFICS

ATHLETICS

[Sports Safety Guidance](#) from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education requires masks for any indoor sports. For any outdoor sports, masks may be removed during training, competition, and other active exercise. Whenever possible, individuals who are not fully vaccinated should continue to wear a mask during contacts with other unvaccinated individuals that do not occur during gameplay, such as on the sideline or bench, in the locker room, during team meetings, in the weight room, on the team bus or carpooling, or during meals, especially when indoors.

BAND, ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR

Students will wear masks and face the same direction while playing and/or singing. Band students will use instrument bell covers. Students will spread out with at least three feet between them. Students will not share wind instruments.

DRINKING FOUNTAINS & WATER FILLING STATIONS

Drinking fountains and water filling stations will reopen this school year. They will be subject to routine cleaning. Students and staff are encouraged to bring water bottles to fill at the fountains or filling stations instead of drinking directly from the water source.

LOCKERS

Middle and high school students will each be assigned a locker. Administrators are still working out details for how often students may use lockers. Each building administration will share information with students as plans are finalized.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Students will continue with physical education largely as they participated prior to COVID-19. This means students will dress for physical education when appropriate – such as middle and high school – and share equipment as necessary. Physical distancing, hand washing and masks will all be used as mitigation strategies.

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

All visitors older than 2 will be required to wear a mask that covers the nose and mouth while indoors at any RPS 205 locations. This mask mandate is for all visitors, regardless of vaccination status.