



## Safe Return to In-Person Learning, Fall 2021

**Revised & Approved by the WAPS School Board at their 9/2/2021 board meeting  
In effect beginning Monday, 8/30/2021**

Winona Area Public Schools is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment that supports social and emotional development, access to critical services, and improvements in life outcomes for all. COVID-19 prevention strategies remain critical to protecting people, including students, teachers, and staff, who are not fully vaccinated, especially in areas of substantial-to-high community transmission levels. We believe it is important that we all remember to respect the decisions and actions of others in our community while we seek the common goal of a safe environment.

Together with local public health officials, Winona Area Public Schools will consider multiple factors when making decisions about implementing or reducing layered prevention strategies against COVID-19. Since WAPS serves the surrounding community, decisions are based on the district’s population, families and students served, as well as the Winona Community. All protocols are subject to change if substantial or high levels of COVID-19 transmission occur in the local community/in-school.

The primary risk factors considered and monitored include:

- Level of [community transmission](#) of COVID-19.
- [COVID-19 vaccination coverage](#) in the community and among students, teachers, and staff.
- COVID-19 outbreaks or increasing trends in the school (internal) or the surrounding community.
- Ages of children served by K-12 schools and the associated social and behavioral factors that may affect the risk of transmission and the feasibility of different prevention strategies.

<b>CDC Metrics &amp; Thresholds</b>		
Transmission Level	Case growth per 100,000 (cumulative weekly rate)	Positive (7-day rate) - Percentage of tests that are positive during the past 7 days
Blue (Low)	<10	<5%
Yellow (Moderate)	10-49	5-7.9%
Orange (Substantial)	50-99	8-9.9%
Red (High)	≥100	≥10%

## Fall Guidance

- MDH [Best Practice Recommendations for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools for the 2021-22 School Year \(PDF\)](#) - Updated 7/28/21
- MDH [Recommendations for Handling a Confirmed Case of COVID-19 \(PDF\)](#) - Updated 8/11/21
- CDC: [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- [Minnesota State High School League 2021-2022 COVID-19 Guidance](#)

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### I. Federal Government and Minnesota Rule Requirements

Face coverings: All people are required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order to wear face coverings on all indoor public transportation conveyances (airports, public buses, etc.), including school buses. See [CDC: Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs](#)

Handling a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19: Minnesota Rule 4605.7070 requires any person in charge of any institution, school, child care facility, or camp to report cases of COVID-19 to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). See [MDH: Reportable Disease Rule](#)

### II. Face Coverings: Subject to change based on risk levels for COVID-19 transmission.

The 2021-22 school year will begin with a universal indoor masking requirement for all people entering district buildings during classroom instructional hours (7:15 A.M. - 3:45 P.M.), including teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status. Following 3:45 P.M., the masking requirement remains in effect for students, staff, and visitors for all instructional

programs (i.e. early childhood, extended day classes or instructional programs) and our child care programs which are licensed child care center services for children under 12 years of age.

The Incident Command Advisory Team will assess internal and community-level data and shift the requirement from required to strongly recommended based on risk levels for transmission in school and childcare settings. This will be measured through two 14-day incubation periods, as 28 days with low internal/community cases suggests low risks of transmission. Communication will be sent to all students, staff, and families when a shift in the face covering protocol is appropriate.

Exceptions can be made for the following categories of people:

- A. 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 (ADA) (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.)
- B. [Children under 2 years of age](#) should not wear a mask.

Table 1: Face Covering Protocols based on Risk of Transmission

Low Blue	Moderate Yellow	Substantial Orange	High Red
<p><b>Masking is strongly recommended</b> for all people entering district buildings, including teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.</p> <p>Transportation: All people are required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <a href="#">order</a> to wear face coverings on all public transportation conveyances (airports, public buses, etc.), including school buses.</p> <p>Individuals who begin exhibiting common symptom(s) consistent with COVID-19 while in attendance will be asked to wear a face covering when visiting the health office and while waiting to go home.</p>		<p><b>Universal Masking requirement</b> for all people entering district buildings, including teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.</p> <p>Transportation: All people are required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <a href="#">order</a> to wear face coverings on all public transportation conveyances (airports, public buses, etc.), including school buses.</p>	

### III. Physical Distancing and Cohorting

Physical distancing will be implemented to the extent possible within structures, but Winona Area Public Schools will not exclude students to keep a minimum distance requirement. A distance of

at least 6 feet will be encouraged between students and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated. A distance of 3 feet will be established whenever possible between students and teachers/staff in instructional settings and during mealtimes. When three feet is not feasible, layering of additional mitigation strategies are essential, such as masking for all students, staff, and visitors, or the use of plexiglass dividers.

Cohorting will be used to limit the number of students, teachers, and staff who come in contact with each other, especially when it is challenging to maintain physical distancing and among elementary students (Grades 6 and under). A minimum distance of 6 feet will be maintained between elementary cohort groups and unnecessary mixing between cohort groups will be limited.

Classroom teachers/staff are required to document seating charts/cohort groups to identify close contacts when someone tests positive for COVID-19.

#### **IV. Health Screening and Staying Home When Sick**

Procedures for student admittance, attendance, and elimination from school will continue to follow Minnesota state laws, public health policies, and medical infectious disease guidelines regarding communicable diseases. General information regarding communicable diseases and student exclusion from school is listed on the [Student Health Services webpage](#).

Students, staff, and visitors are expected to complete a [daily health screening](#) for symptoms of illness PRIOR to entering the building and must stay home if they are experiencing any “more common symptoms” or 2 “less common symptoms” of COVID-19. WAPS will use pathways outlined in the [COVID-19 Decision Tree](#) to evaluate and recommend the best path for all children, students, and staff, regardless of vaccination status, who are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

When applicable, individuals experiencing symptoms will be asked to 1. Get tested, 2. Receive an alternative diagnosis from a health care provider, or 3. Stay home for 10 days until they feel better and are fever-free for 24 hours without using a medicine that lowers fevers.

- A.** *More common symptoms are one or more of these:* fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher; new cough or a cough that gets worse; difficulty/hard time breathing; and new loss of taste or smell.
- B.** *Less common symptoms are two or more of these:* sore throat; nausea; vomiting; diarrhea; chills; muscle pain; extreme fatigue/feeling very tired; new severe/very bad headache; and new nasal congestion/stuffy or runny nose.

## V. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

### *Isolation protocol for when someone tests positive for COVID-19*

- A. If a student, participant, or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, they must stay at home and away from others who live in the house (isolation) for at least 10 days from the time the symptoms started (or the day they were tested if they have no symptoms), and until symptoms have improved and they have had no fever for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications.
- B. Siblings and other household members who are not fully vaccinated or have not had lab-confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days must stay home and stay away from all activities for 14 days (quarantine), which starts the day they last had contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19. Siblings and other household members do not qualify for a shortened quarantine period.

### *Contact tracing and quarantine protocols*

- C. When notified of a positive case that was present and able to infect others, contact tracing will be conducted to review documentation and determine close contacts needing to quarantine. A close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
  - 1. **Exception for K-12 indoor classroom settings only:** In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student where both students were correctly wearing well-fitting masks. This will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the risk of exposure is minimal.
    - a) **This exception does not apply to;** teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting; and students in Early Childhood Programs, Key Kids, extracurricular activities, or athletics.
- D. Identified close contacts will be required to stay home from all activities for a minimum of 10 full days without testing, or 7 full days with a PCR-negative test (not an antigen test or antibody/blood test) if the test occurred FIVE full days after exposure or later. All individuals must watch for symptoms of COVID-19 through day 14.
  - a. Children and staff who are fully vaccinated or who have had lab-confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days may not need to quarantine. To qualify for a quarantine exemption, individuals must meet all criteria outlined in MDH: [Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19](#); AND voluntarily provide appropriate documentation of COVID-19 vaccination record or lab-confirmed positive COVID-19 test results PRIOR to the approval of their eligibility to participate/work.

## **VI. Screening Testing**

In partnership with MDE and MDH, Winona Area Public Schools is developing a plan to offer free testing opportunities for students and staff. In the interim period before implementing a district-wide COVID-19 testing program, WAPS will continue to offer Vault COVID-19 testing kits to students and staff who wish to be tested. Parents and staff members can obtain more information or request a test any time by contacting Jackie Henderson, COVID-19 Coordinator at [jacqueline.henderson@winona.k12.mn.us](mailto:jacqueline.henderson@winona.k12.mn.us) or (507) 494-0867.

Based on current levels of community spread across Minnesota, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and MDH recommend that all unvaccinated school-age children and school staff should get tested for COVID-19 at least weekly throughout the school year. Vaccinated students and school staff should get tested if they are experiencing [symptoms](#) or were exposed to someone who has COVID-19.

## **VII. Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene**

Students and staff members are encouraged to build routines of handwashing and respiratory etiquette into the daily schedule. Employees, students, and visitors will be instructed to cover their mouth and nose with their sleeve or tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Hand hygiene will be promoted during key times, such as arrival and dismissal; before, during, and after preparing or eating food; after using the bathroom; after blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing. All students, staff, and visitors are encouraged to use hand sanitizer prior to or immediately upon entering district buildings. All buildings will have hand sanitizer dispensers available for public use.

## **VIII. Mealtimes**

All students will be advised to sanitize their hands prior to entering the lunch line and after eating lunch. Students will be assigned to tables and groups sitting together during mealtimes will remain the same from day to day. Students will remain at their assigned tables/seats and there will be staggered dismissal strategies to limit intermixing in lunch lines. All tables will be cleaned in between lunch periods.

- A.** Elementary: Seating should be limited to classroom pods with documented seating charts for contact tracing purposes. Students may sit on both sides of the table, staggering to avoid facing each other, to the extent possible. Staff should clean and disinfect common surfaces between each group of students.
- B.** Middle School: Documentation of lunch cohort groups is required for contact tracing purposes (6 to a table); Students will remain in assigned cohort groups that do not intermix during mealtimes.

- C. High School and WALC: Documentation of lunch seating is required for contact tracing purposes; Students may sit on both sides of the table, staggering to avoid facing each other, to the extent possible.

## **IX. Cleaning and Ventilation**

Winona Area Public Schools has evaluated the operational capacity of indoor ventilation systems to ensure they are in proper working order in preparation for the school year. Whenever possible, steps will be taken to increase the intake percentage of outside air to increase dilution of contaminants, and minimize recirculation, while maintaining indoor air conditions. In the absence of effective mechanical ventilation, steps will be taken to increase natural ventilation as much as possible, including opening windows when possible and safe.

Regular housekeeping practices are conducted by our maintenance department, including routine environmental cleaning of classrooms and common spaces.

## **X. Accommodations for Children with Disabilities**

Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies and procedures will be provided. To learn more about accommodations, parents/guardians should contact their child's case manager.

## **XI. Visitors and Volunteers**

WAPS welcomes visitors, community providers, volunteers, and other authorized adults into district buildings as long as they adhere to relevant provisions of the *WAPS Safe Return to In-Person Learning Plan*.

Nonpublic students visiting district buildings to receive educational services will adhere to relevant provisions of the *WAPS Safe Return to In-Person Learning Plan*.

All classrooms, sites, and programs are required to keep a roster of visitors and volunteers (name, contact information, date, time, program, site, etc.) for contact tracing purposes.

## **XII. Key Kids, Athletics/Activities, Facilities Rentals**

### *Key Kids School Age Child Care*

As Key Kids is a licensed childcare facility that serves children under the ages of 12, prevention strategies remain an important tool in mitigating the spread among populations who have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated. In addition to all other provisions in the WAPS Return to In-Person Learning Plan, face coverings will be required to be worn indoors by all participants and supervising staff members while in attendance. **NOTE: the use of face coverings**

**indoors will still be required AT ALL TIMES for participants and staff who are present at Key Kids activities following instructional hours (after 3:45 P.M.).**

*Athletics and Extracurricular Activities*

WAPS will offer a full range of extracurricular activities as long as all participants in those activities, as well as coaches and advisors, adhere to the requirements listed below.

- A. Competitions/Games:** All participants, coaches, and advisors must comply with WAPS COVID-19 protocols at home events. All people will be required to wear face coverings on school buses and other transportation vehicles. When traveling to other schools for away events, WAPS participants, coaches, and other persons must comply with away school district's protocols, unless they contradict and are more relaxed than the provisions of the *WAPS Safe Return to In-Person Learning Plan*.
- B. Face Coverings:** When distancing cannot be maintained, such as on the sidelines, student-athletes will be strongly recommended to wear a face covering both indoors and outdoors. Face Coverings are required to be worn by all people on school buses and other district transportation vehicles.
- C. Transportation:** All people will be required to wear face coverings on school buses and other transportation vehicles. Distancing will be implemented to the extent possible and/or student-athletes will remain seated with their cohort assignment.
- D. Physical Distancing/Cohorts:** Student-athletes should remain in cohort groups when applicable, and pods of students should remain 6' from other pods.
- E. Health Screening:** All participants are expected to complete daily health screenings prior to coming to school. Students should refrain from these activities when they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and should be tested. If students are absent from school due to being sick or in quarantine, they must remain home from after-school activities and athletics.
- F. Contact Tracing and Quarantine:** Contact tracing will be conducted to identify those needing to quarantine. Coaches are expected to have documentation of student cohort groups and seating assignments for transportation. People who are fully vaccinated can refrain from quarantine following a known exposure if asymptomatic, facilitating continued participation in in-person learning, sports, and extracurricular activities.

*Facility Rentals*

Facility rentals will be expected to comply with the *WAPS Safe Return to In-Person Learning Plan* if they are utilizing district buildings during classroom instructional hours. However, following 3:45 P.M., all people who enter WAPS buildings are strongly recommended to follow COVID-19 protocols outlined in this plan; including the use of face coverings indoors and practicing social distancing.