

# The Diocese of Knoxville Catholic Schools

## COVID-19 Mitigation Policies and Procedures 2021-2022



*Diocese of Knoxville Catholic Schools: Developing Scholars, Leaders, and Saints*



*Approved by: Bishop Richard S. Stika and the Senior Leadership Team*



SACRED HEART  
CATHEDRAL SCHOOL  
EST. 1956



KNOXVILLE CATHOLIC  
HIGH SCHOOL



NOTRE DAME  
HIGH SCHOOL - CHATTANOOGA



SAINT JOSEPH  
SCHOOL  
founded - 1963



SAINT DOMINIC  
CATHOLIC SCHOOL



SAINT JOHN NEUMANN  
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

## **Introduction**

As Catholic schools, we have been invited by Pope Francis to embrace creativity and inventiveness so that we can implement new methods of engagement and ministry. This past year has demonstrated what can be done when we work together as a community and remain focused on our Catholic school educational mission. Evidence to date, including our own evidence, suggests that when schools implement prevention strategies with fidelity, transmission within school can be limited (2021). The policies and procedural protocols below provide the foundation for our schools to build on to have Christ-centered, faith-filled, safe, nurturing academic school environments.

## **General Health & Well-Being Policies**

### **Health Examination & Vaccinations**

- To ensure that all students have up-to-date health exams and vaccinations, schools shall require health examinations and proof of immunization of each student in accordance with the regulations of the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Department of Health. (*Diocesan policy 1320*).
- Three COVID-19 vaccines are authorized for adults, and one (Pfizer) can also be given to children age 12 and older. Research has revealed the vaccines to be highly effective and safe against COVID-19. While the Diocese of Knoxville does not require COVID-19 vaccinations for employees or students, vaccinations for all eligible persons are highly recommended based on the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).
- Parents of medically vulnerable students are encouraged to consult with their child's health-care provider concerning physical attendance at school. Our schools are committed to working with families for the optimum educational plan for each child.

## **Health Requirements: Employees & Students**

- To ensure that all students and employees in the Diocese of Knoxville conform to local county health department regulations, principals/presidents shall keep on file a copy of the local county health department regulations concerning students and employees. Student health information should be verified at least annually to ensure that the information is current. (*Diocesan policies 1330 & 3120*).

## **Notification of Communicable Diseases**

- Parents must notify the school if his/her child has a communicable disease at which time the school will notify the parents of children who may have been exposed to the disease. The student's anonymity will be maintained. Guidelines from the Tennessee Department of Health will be used in conjunction with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Health Insurance Portability, and Accountability Act (HIPAA). (*Diocesan policy 3040*).
- Parents must notify the school if his/her child has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or has been exposed to COVID-19 and is in quarantine (*Diocesan policy 3040*).

## **Screening**

- Students and employees must remain at home if they are ill.
- Families and employees are encouraged to use the following questions for at-home screening assessment:
  1. Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?
  2. Are you experiencing a cough, shortness of breath or a sore throat?
  3. Have you had a fever (100.4 or higher) in the last 48 hours?
  4. Have you had new loss of taste or smell?
  5. Have you had vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours?
- *Close contact* is defined as someone who is within 3 feet of a person who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more (with or without a mask) over a 24-hour period, someone who has provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19, someone who had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them),

shared eating or drinking utensils, someone who sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on another person.

- Temperature screening of employees, students, and visitors will not be conducted daily at school. Families are encouraged to conduct temperature screening at home for suspected illness. If a student has a temperature of 100.4 or higher, the student should remain at home.
- Anyone who answers *yes* to the screening questions or is suffering from multiple COVID-19\* symptoms (different from normal allergies) must not enter the premises for the safety of all.

\*COVID-19 symptoms are:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore Throat
- New loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain (especially in children)
- Malaise
- Fatigue
- Rash

## **Attendance**

- School attendance is required by state law; therefore, schools must keep accurate and complete attendance records (*Diocesan policy 1030*).
- Traditional school attendance policies for non-COVID illnesses continue to be in effect.
- Faculty and students will be excused from physical attendance at school for any of the following COVID-19 related reasons:
  - A positive test for COVID-19

- Presenting a fever of 100.4 or higher
- Exhibiting two or more of the symptoms of COVID-19 based on CDC guidance
- An employee or student has been asked to quarantine because of exposure
- State or regional mandates to close school for on-site learning (All Catholic schools will shift to the remote learning plan).

### **Contact Tracing for Positive COVID-19 Cases**

- Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine will be in place at all 10 of our Catholic schools. Case investigation and contract tracing are critical strategies to identify and isolate cases. Testing and quarantine close contacts will be used to reduce transmission.
- The school will conduct contact tracing for confirmed cases of COVID-19 exposure.
- Students and employees who provide confidential proof of COVID-19 immunizations will not be quarantined as a result of contact tracing.
- Positive COVID-19 test results indicates the student/employee will isolate/quarantine at home for 10 days.
- Students determined to be “close contact” to a positive case will isolate/quarantine at home for 3 full days and then it is recommended that they take a COVID-19 test on the 4<sup>th</sup> day. If the COVID-19 test is negative and student has no symptoms, the student may return to school. If the “close contact” student or employee’s test result is positive, he/she will remain at home quarantined for at least an additional 6 days (or shorter if they receive a negative result in a subsequent test). For the individual that recently tested positive, his/her 10 days would start over on the date of the positive test.

### **Extended Absence due to Quarantine**

- If students are not able to be physically at school, the school will work with families to create an education plan to ensure the students are progressing in their education.
- If a student is not able to be physically present at school due to COVID-19 symptoms or has had a positive COVID-19 test, his or her siblings (or other students living in the same household) will be transitioned to a remote learning plan and asked to self-quarantine until the family member meets the requirements for returning to school. With each positive case in the household, the quarantine time begins anew. The school will work

with each family privately to create an educational plan for the duration of the self-quarantine.

### **Procedures for Isolation during the School Day**

- Any student or staff who exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the day at school will be moved into a safe, private, isolation space for evaluation and pick-up. Those suspected of illness will be provided a facial shield in addition to their facial mask when interacting with others and sent home as quickly as possible. Anyone assisting the individual will also wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE). The school will maintain accurate records of all in contact with the individual that is ill. The room will be disinfected frequently throughout the day.
- The school will ensure the individual is safe and does not need emergency medical attention. If the individual appears seriously ill, the school will call 911 before calling the parent, guardian, or emergency contact.

### **Returning to School after Physical Absence from the Campus due to COVID-19 or COVID-19 related health concerns**

Students and faculty members may return to school if they satisfy any of the following guidelines:

- A health care provider confirms that the individual's illness is not due to COVID-19 because another explanation was identified (For example, strep throat confirmed by a positive strep test or a rash from poison ivy). (Note: Diagnoses of upper respiratory tract infection, pneumonia, and viral illness do not exclude the diagnosis of COVID-19 and should not be considered as adequate to return to school).
- Testing for COVID-19 is not a mandatory requirement to return to school. However, if a child is absent from school for fever, sore throat, cough, diarrhea (vomiting if accompanied with diarrhea), then it is highly recommended to request your child's healthcare provider to conduct COVID-19 testing. The child presenting with these symptoms is likely to be contagious for ten (10) days and will have to quarantine and participate in at-home learning, but a negative COVID-19 test would decrease the quarantine period.
- Persons are required to remain out of school until the following conditions are met:

- He/she has not had a fever for at least 24 hours without fever reducing medications
- Respiratory and other symptoms have improved for at least 24 hours
- If a person has tested positive for COVID-19, but are asymptomatic, he/she may return to school after ten (10) to fourteen (14) calendar days or when he/she has been released from a healthcare provider.
- If a person has been exposed to COVID-19, he/she must adhere to complete isolation for a minimum of ten (10) calendar days or until he/she has been released from a healthcare provider to return to school.

### **Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in the School**

The school will notify parents of students who may have been in close contact to an individual with a confirmed case. Confidentiality of the individual will be maintained and will not be identified in communications to the school community at large, but may need to be selectively identified for contact tracing by the school or health department. The school will maintain close contact with the local health department in identifying contacts of the infected individual. Contacts will have to self-quarantine for a minimum of ten (10) days from their last contact with the infected individual.

In the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 amongst students or faculty at the school, the school will implement the following tiered communications approach---keeping always as the primary goals of safe precautions, the privacy of our community members, and open communication.

(1) Exposed Individuals: Relying on the assistance from our contacts at the local health department, the school will first determine and directly communicate quarantine protocols to those who may have been exposed to the confirmed case--including possible exposure to school staff members. Exposure is currently defined by the CDC as being within 6 feet of the positive case (regardless of mask-wearing) for a duration of 10 minutes or more.

(2) Grade/Class Level Communication- While protecting the privacy of individuals, the school will notify parents of a particular grade or class that there

has been a confirmed case and that those exposed have already been notified. Acting on the guidance of the health department concerning contact tracing, the school will directly communicate with the parents of students identified as being at risk of exposure.

(3) Community-Wide Notice: - The school will also notify the whole community that there has been a confirmed case in a particular grade level and that those exposed have already been notified.



## **Procedures & Protocols**

The following are the highest priority procedural protocols to mitigate risk and optimize the return of students to schools in the context of physical distancing guidelines and the appropriate developmental level of students. Protocols will be explicit and directly taught to students.

### **Infection Prevention Education**

- Faculty and staff will implement infection prevention education including hand hygiene, physical distancing, facial coverings, and spending time outdoors for students and families in a developmentally appropriate manner.

### **Hygiene and Sanitation**

- The school will adhere to safe cleaning and disinfecting protocols with EPA-approved products for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 throughout the school according to the CDC recommendations.
- Hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol will be readily available for use by students and staff.
- Students and faculty will be reminded to frequently wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Young children will be appropriately supervised when using hand sanitizers and other cleaning products.

### **Physical/Social Distancing**

- The school will make every effort to ensure appropriate physical distancing according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the CDC recommendations. This is defined as three (3) to six (6) feet.
- Spectators for athletic events will abide by local regulations and the standard protocols in place during the school day.
- Efforts will be made to maintain as normal social interaction as possible.

### **Facial Coverings/Masks**

- The diocese strongly supports the personal decisions of families and individuals regarding COVID-19 vaccinations and other protective measures, including masks, therefore, face mask usage will be at the discretion of the parents.

- Employees and students should bring protective facial coverings to school daily and wear them when physical distancing cannot be maintained or when directed by the supervising adult. Facial shields, rather than cloth masks, may be worn in the classroom.
- When exercising or during outdoor recess activity, protective facial masks may be removed.

**Outdoor/Ventilation:** Schools are encouraged to provide outdoor classrooms if possible and to utilize large outdoor spaces for instruction, physical activity, and eating when possible.

**Experiential Learning/Field Trips:** Experiential learning through off-campus field trips will be allowed. Schools will adhere to protocols established by the venue of the field trip. Teachers are always encouraged to incorporate experiential learning on campus through engaging activities and virtual experiences.

**Extra-curricular Activities/Events:** Standard protocols in place for the school day will also be in place for gatherings, extracurricular activities including athletic events, plays, concerts, and other type activities.

- Spectators for athletic events will abide by local regulations and the standard protocols in place during the school day.

### **COVID-19 Action Triggers**

1. Positive COVID-19 test results = student/employee will isolate/quarantine at home for 10 days.
2. Students determined to be “close contact” to a positive case= student will isolate/quarantine at home for 3 full days and then take a COVID-19 test on the 4<sup>th</sup> day. If COVID-19 test is negative and student has no symptoms, the student may return to school. If the “close contact” student’s test result is positive, they will remain at home quarantined for an additional 6 days (or shorter if they receive a negative result in a subsequent test).
3. If 10% of the school’s student population ( in a 10-day period) have received a positive test and are quarantined at home, all students (regardless of vaccination status) will be required to wear a facemask while in the school\*.

\*The face masking requirements outlined above may be removed if there is a decreasing trend in COVID-19 outbreaks in children/faculty/staff in our schools and surrounding community. (The 10% triggers are exclusive and not combinations of the two categories (student population versus faculty and staff population)).

## Conclusion

This document provides the framework to plan and implement a safe, efficient re-entry in our Catholic Schools. It is important to realize that it is informed by evidence and global best practices, but it is limited by the boundaries of scientific knowledge about COVID-19 and its impact on our communities. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that there is insufficient data to make recommendations that entirely remove risk from returning to school. It is also likely that as more information is acquired that plans will evolve. Our schools are committed to using all available information to make the best-informed decisions for our students and families regarding safety procedures. Please know that we are committed to monitoring and adjusting these plans accordingly and will inform our communities when any adjustments are made.

Each school will provide a more detailed description of its procedures and protocols for the daily school routine. A list of helpful resources are provided below. If you have questions, you may contact the Catholic Schools' Office at 865-584-3307, [sprater@dioknox.org](mailto:sprater@dioknox.org), or your Catholic school principal or president. While there may still be levels of uneasiness or uncertainty, we can say with great confidence that we will face these challenges as a community of faith. "The Holy Spirit upsets us because it move us, makes us walk, pushes the Church forward" (Pope Francis). Let us all look for moments of grace as we enter this school year. May our Lady shower her blessings on our school communities.

## TIPS FOR HELPING STUDENTS GET USED TO MASKS OR SHIELDS



- 1 **MODEL WEARING MASKS. MOST CHILDREN WILL FOLLOW THE ADULT'S EXAMPLE WITHOUT FEAR.**
- 2 **USE SIMPLE WORDS TO EXPLAIN WHY PEOPLE ARE WEARING MASKS.**



- 3 **GIVE CHILDREN TIME TO LOOK, WATCH, AND PRACTICE WEARING A MASK.**



- 4 **ATTACH FACIAL SHIELDS TO A FAVORITE CAP OR HAT.**



- 5 **ANSWER KIDS' QUESTIONS & GIVE SUPPORT.**



- 6 **MAKE IT FUN! ALLOW KIDS TO PICK OUT & DECORATE THEIR OWN FACE MASKS.**



- 7 **HAVE A FEW MASKS HANDY WHILE CHILDREN PLAY. YOUNGER CHILDREN MAY ENJOY BEING A MASKED SUPER HERO OR DOCTOR.**

- 8 **DESCRIBE THE MASK OR SHIELD AS ANOTHER PART OF THE SCHOOL UNIFORM.**



## Family Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics [aap.healthychildren.org](http://aap.healthychildren.org)

Return to School During COVID-19

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx>

Regreso a la escuela durante el COVID-19

<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/health-issues/conditions/covid-19/paginas/return-to-school-during-covid-19.aspx>

Wearing Face Masks and How to Explain it to Kids

<https://www.lifespan.org/lifespan-living/wearing-face-masks-and-how-explain-it-kids>

Kids health: Helping Kids Get Used to Masks

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-masks.html>

How to Make Face masks more Comfortable for Kids

<https://www.childrensmn.org/2020/06/05/make-face-masks-comfortable-kids/>