

The Diocese of Youngstown Catholic Schools are dedicated to providing students and families with an educational experience that nurtures faith, inspires learning, fosters service, and builds leadership.

COVID-19 Plan Revised August 20, 2021

With the coronavirus pandemic still with us, we remain ever aware of our responsibility to protect our children. We continue to rely on the guidance of our health professionals. We are all aware of how deadly this disease can be, and our thoughts and prayers are with all who have experienced it either personally or with loved ones.

As Catholic communities, our schools strive to protect the needs and dignity of the individuals as well as to live our call to love one another, to protect the vulnerable and all life, and be mindful of the common good of those in our communities.

We ask parents to thoughtfully and prayerfully read the most current information and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) for your information. Throughout this past year and a half, much has been learned. Much is still to be learned.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/resources/news-releases-news-you-can-use/odh-news-release-k12-07-27-21>

The COVID-19 plan for 2021-2021 continues to be based on multiple strategies that work together to layer protection around our students.

Masks

Face Masks are required to be worn in the school building during school hours, including before care and aftercare, by all students, staff, volunteers, and visitors beginning August 20th. This is a temporary measure that will be evaluated mid-September following data from the schools and local health departments, the Ohio Department of Health, and the CDC.

When a school is able to return to a voluntary mask policy, masks will still be highly encouraged. They will still be required:

- On the school bus, as it is considered public transportation, thus falling under federal law.
- For a period of time in the event of a school COVID outbreak, or the local health department deems it to be a necessary step due to local circumstances.
- On field trips unless outdoors and for any other activity that a school determines may be prudent.

During indoor sporting events or other events after school hours, masks are still highly encouraged by all but are not required.

Ohio Revised Code 3707.11 gives health departments authority to quarantine or isolate. COVID-19 is a Class A, reportable disease for quarantine or isolation. <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3707.11> Thus, any directives given to a school by their local health department regarding exposure, quarantine, and isolation will be followed. (See the chart later in this communication. It will be followed.) <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/covid-19-fact-sheet-k-12-exposure-and-quarantine.pdf>

Additional Considerations for parents when masks are voluntary:

- We have no control over what happens outside of our schools. The protocols that are in place in the “outside” world are much more relaxed than last school year, causing us some concern about how to safeguard our unvaccinated children when in our care.
- There may be some children in your child’s class who may be more vulnerable or whose family has suffered from loss due to COVID. These families may feel as strongly about wearing masks as some feel about not wearing one. Respect for either parental choice should be shown.
- Consider the bigger picture when making your masking choice. Administrators and teachers reported very little concern on the part of students last year; they were pretty adaptable. Particularly during an uptick in cases in the area, the more loving thing to do may be to wear a mask during this time of continued uncertainty.
- Whatever your decision, please speak with your children about your expectations that they are respectful of their other classmates, regardless of the mask choice of the family.
- Mask-wearing strengthens the protection that other protocols we have in place provide: social distancing, frequent cleaning and sanitation, frequent hand-washing, attention to ventilation, and keeping students home when sick.
- Students who wear a mask to school are less likely to be quarantined if they come into contact with a positive case in a classroom setting. If an unvaccinated student is exposed to COVID-19, and he/she is wearing a mask, that student can remain in-person, participate in extra-curriculars and sports, as long as there are no symptoms.
- While the cases of COVID-19 are still statistically very low in children, they are very real to the families who experience them.
- The collaboration and interaction that is an important part of learning can more easily occur.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations for COVID are not required in the Diocese of Youngstown. However vaccination is the leading public health strategy available to slow the spread and hopefully put an end to this disease. We strongly encourage families to consult with your health care providers regarding vaccination decisions.

- Currently children ages 12 and up do have an option for the vaccine.
- Vaccinations are morally acceptable in the Catholic Church and have been advocated for by Pope Francis as an act of love and solidarity.

- A fully vaccinated person, including a child 12 and above, is not required to quarantine. While it is not required that proof of vaccination be submitted at this time, proof will need to be shown in order to exempt a person from any required quarantine.
- The areas in the country that are especially exploding with the delta variant that is affecting both adults and children have high numbers of unvaccinated people. The majority of hospitalized people who are seriously ill enough to be hospitalized right now with COVID, even in our area, are people who are not vaccinated.

The vaccination status of members of the school community, including staff and students, is considered confidential medical information and will be protected as such.

Social Distancing

- Regular occupancy numbers in classrooms, lunchrooms, and other spaces may resume, with adherence to the minimum **three-foot physical distance** recommended by the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics as much as possible.
- Attendance at school Masses is an individual pastor/school decision. Social distancing to the degree possible is strongly encouraged.
- School access to visitors and volunteers during the school day will continue to be limited as schools assess health and safety routines.
- Schools may consider a hybrid approach to parent meetings; however, in person meetings after school hours are permitted with attention to safety.

Health and Safety Assessment

Assess at Home: Parents are asked to keep children home with any signs of infectious disease and seek advice from a health care professional for needed care and/or testing. (See COVID Symptoms Chart)

- Last school year our schools reported very little illness; attributed to all of the protocols that were in place, including parent vigilance in keeping their children home when sick. Local health departments are predicting a rise in flu and other communicable diseases. Thus we ask families to follow their normal flu shot routine in conjunction with your local health care provider.

Assess at School: In collaboration with their school health professional, each school will determine health assessment protocols.

- Consult the school's sick/ absence policy in the family handbook.

Contact Tracing and Exposure: Schools will report any student cases of COVID-19 as required to their local health department and follow their guidelines for quarantining and contact tracing.

- A fully vaccinated person is not required to quarantine. While it is not required that proof of vaccination be submitted at this time, proof may be needed in order to exempt a person from any required quarantine.

Other Mitigation Measures: Continuation of these successful strategies from 2020-2021

- Frequent Hand-Washing
- Intentional Cleaning and Disinfection of classrooms and shared spaces
- Attention to improving Ventilation
- Public water fountains will remain closed unless used for filling stations for water bottles
- Use of one-way traffic routes in stairwells and halls

Instruction

Our schools will be operating fully in person for the 2021-2022 school year. Being face to face with our students best fosters the Catholic community that is the signature mission of our schools, and provides the best environment for learning. We encourage parents to be diligent in sending their children to school when they are not ill, as consistent attendance is a positive factor in student achievement.

Remote learning may be offered on a temporary basis if a school or partial school closure becomes necessary due to health conditions.

COVID-19 Symptoms

Help prevent the spread of COVID-19

You may have COVID-19 if you experience one or more of the following:

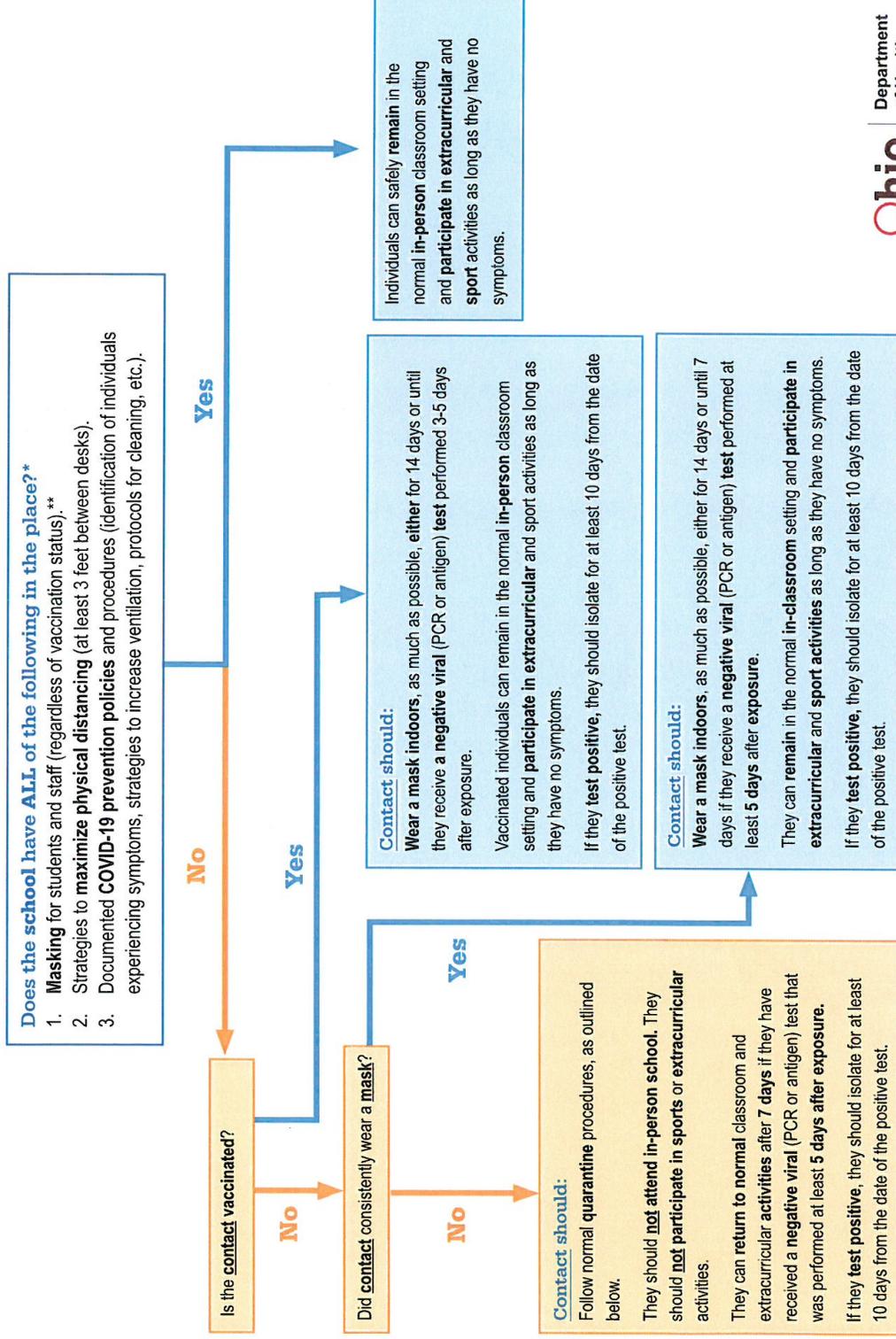
- Fever or chills.
- Cough.
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Fatigue.
- Muscle or body aches.
- Headache.
- Loss of taste or smell.
- Sore throat.
- Congestion or runny nose.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Diarrhea.

Symptoms range from mild to severe and may appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus.

The Diocese of Youngstown and its Catholic schools reserve the right to change this policy at any time during the school year based on the advice of public health experts and high levels of communicable disease spread. Each school works with its local health department. Any change in protocols will be communicated to families and stakeholders through the school's customary communication channels.

Guidelines for Quarantine After Exposure in K-12 Classroom Settings

This chart can help guide quarantine decisions after a student or adult contact is exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the classroom setting.



*This flowchart applies only to COVID-19 exposures that occurred within a K-12 classroom setting. It is not applicable to exposure in the community, extracurricular, or sports environment.

**The person who tested positive for COVID-19 should follow standard isolation procedures.



The Diocese of Youngstown desires for all of its Catholic School students to have in person learning without interruption for the coming school year.

During a period of a temporary mask mandate, when does a person have to wear a mask?

- When moving around in the halls or classrooms or going from place to place.
- When seated in a stationery position closer than three feet apart.
- When a school makes a determination that a situation would be safer if a mask should be worn. i.e music class; close group collaboration, playing board games during indoor recess, etc..

During a period of a temporary mask mandate, when does a mask not need to be worn?

- When outdoors, at recess, or in gym class.
- When seated three feet apart or more.

Why has the Diocese of Youngstown added a TEMPORARY mandatory mask policy to its COVID-19 protocols for all in the school building during school hours right now?

1. Quarantine and isolation rules for exposure in schools

- In early August, quarantine rules for exposure in schools were released. These have been shared with all in past communications but can be found here: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/covid-19-fact-sheet-k-12-exposure-and-quarantine.pdf>
- We do not yet know how and if these may affect school attendance, and this is a concern for school administrators. A few weeks of universal masking in addition to other protocols will allow school to get established in the school year without concern of exposure quarantines.

2. The rise in COVID-19 cases in Ohio as school begins.

- We have had a direct conversation with Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, reviewed communications from the various health departments that serve our schools, and looked at the data for the rise in cases in Ohio from two weeks ago.
- All Ohio counties, including our six, are in the high risk category as of this week's data. That is defined as more than 100 cases per 100,000 residents.

County	Cases per 100,000 8/5	Cases per 100,000 8/12	Cases per 100,000 8/19
Ashtabula	56.6	87.4	107.0
Columbiana	116.8	172.7	333.7
Mahoning	110.6	158.3	220.4
Portage	116.3	167.4	211.7
Stark	96.3	140.3	216.1
Trumbull	105.1	162.1	198.0

- The Ohio Coronavirus Dashboard tracks many different metrics. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/dashboards/overview>

3. Return to Normalcy

- While still keeping all of the layered protections in place, school routines are not going to be as restrictive as last year. Having a temporary mask mandate allows those routines to be established with more confidence. Our schools are still in uncharted territory as this disease has changed and evolved.

When will the temporary mask mandate be lifted?

Several criteria will be used to lift a mandate by county and by school.

When a county dips below 100 cases per 100,000 people two weeks in a row, (keeping in mind that only drops a county to substantial risk level), the local health department will be consulted for any additional information for the area. The circumstances in each school will also be taken into account. Mandates will be lifted by school and county.

If the current predictions based on the trends they are seeing across the country hold true, the Ohio Department of Health anticipates that this current rise should dip again by mid-September.

What if my child is medically unable to wear a mask, even for the shortened amount of time required for this year's temporary mask mandate?

The same procedure as last year is in place. A signed statement from a child's pediatrician with the reason for his or her inability to wear a mask at all should be given to the principal and school nurse.

What kind of mask should be worn?

Face coverings should fit snugly, yet comfortably, and be worn horizontally. Coverings should cover one's nose, mouth, and chin at all times. While masks are preferred, neck gaiters may also be worn if permitted by the school. The colors and design for masks are dictated by school dress code policy.

When will things turn to "normal"?

- The strict routines that were in place last year are already being lifted with the layered protocols for safety in effect. The temporary mask mandate assists with this at the beginning of the year.
- Our schools are permitted to begin scheduling things that have had to be put on hold due to COVID restrictions last year. Adhering to as many layers of protocols as possible allows this to happen.

When the temporary mask mandate moves to a voluntary policy for masking, will masks ever need to be worn?

Our Revised COVID-19 addresses this.

- On the school bus, as it falls under federal law as public transportation.

- For a period of time in the event of a school COVID-19 outbreak, or the local health department deems it necessary due to local circumstances.
- On field trips unless outdoors, and for any other activity a school determines may be prudent.

What if my child is exposed to COVID-19 outside of school?

In this case, the family will follow the direction of the local health department regarding any needed quarantine or isolation and the school will comply with their directions. The rules referenced above are for exposure in school during the school day.

It doesn't make sense that my child may need to wear a mask inside during the school day and not be required anywhere else.

Agreed. That is the dilemma that our school administrators face as they try to insure a solid year of in person engagement of learning for all students.

- Outside of our school walls we do not know where the students have been or to whom they may have been exposed. We are aware that most children have been and will continue to be out into the world with few or any protocols. That is a parent's decision and we respect that.
- But in our buildings we also have children who are immunocompromised, who have family members who are, and whose parents can't control the school environment for them as they might in other outside settings.

What does faith have to do with it?

The decision to add a temporary mask mandate to the additional protocols in place at this time reflects what we feel is prudent healthwise for our schools at this moment in order to keep our students in school. It also reflects our responsibility to the school communities as a whole for the benefit of the common good. This is not an attempt to limit anyone's freedom, but an attempt to ensure the freedom of all to safely return to school and hopefully stay there. We have taken into consideration the health guidance we have been given. As Catholic schools, our faith also informs our decisions.

In addition to health concerns for the ability to stay in school, the decision to implement a **temporary** mask mandate in our schools was also a pro-life decision by Bishop Bonnar, myself, and the Office of Catholic Schools staff. We have a responsibility to protect the majority of our students who are not vaccinated during the time that they are in our care.

What should parents do?

Parents have the right to choose the environment that they feel is best for their child. As you make your decision during this period of temporary masking we ask that you consider the following:

- This is temporary.
- The mask protocols and school routines from last year will look different.
- The adults in our children's lives are the ones that shape how children respond to situations. We respectfully ask that we all weather this next few weeks together, assuring the children that we believe this is a temporary situation for masks to be worn indoors during the school day. And at times we may need to choose actions that benefit others.