

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.

August 13, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In our communication dated August 2, 2021, the anticipated protocols for the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year were outlined. The guidance also made clear that circumstances would be monitored and resulting updates would be communicated. Since this was sent out, further information was received.

Our goal is to keep children in school for in person learning, as we believe that best supports growth in our students cognitively, emotionally, and developmentally; and the experience of community helps them to grow spiritually as well.

This communication will address information that families need to know as you make decisions regarding the wearing of masks for your children. While our mask policy for students is not changing at this time, additional information has been released that should be considered by parents as they make the best decision for their child. We are instituting a mask policy for adults who are employed by or at the school during the regular school day.

Masks for Students

Masks are strongly recommended by both the CDC and ODH to be worn indoors for individuals who are not fully vaccinated. **Masks may always be worn, and are HIGHLY encouraged at this time.** Except in the following instances, masks for students will be voluntary at this time.

- Masks must be worn on the school bus, as it is considered public transportation, thus falling under federal law.
- Masks may be required 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 or an exposure.

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 will be followed.

(See the chart later in this communication. It will be followed.)

Considerations for Student Mask-Wearing In-Doors in the School Building

While we respect the right for a parent to make the mask decision for their child, unless mandated by the health department, we respectfully remind everyone that the decisions we make also may affect others. As you finalize your decision, please consider the following.

- We have no control over what happens outside of our schools. The protocols that were 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.

- Parents can monitor their child's outside contacts except in school. There are immuno-compromised students and adults in our schools. There are many unvaccinated students in our schools. Taking care of the community is a responsibility of all of us and a manifestation of the love we are to give one another.
- 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.
- Remote learning will only be utilized if an entire school or portion of a school is mandated to be closed due to COVID. Teachers will of course continue to use Google Classroom and other tools to communicate assignments whenever a student is ill for any reason.

Masks for Adults During School Hours

Since unvaccinated adults can more easily spread the virus, an extra layer of protection for our students is the requirement that adults in the schools during school hours while in the building, including before and aftercare programs, wear a mask **or** show proof of vaccination.

- All employees in the school
- All visitors and volunteers

Vaccinations

The most effective way available now to fight the spread of the virus is vaccination. 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.
- 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.
- Vaccinations are morally acceptable in the Catholic Church and have been advocated for by Pope Francis as an act of love and solidarity.
- 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.

COVID-19 Resources

<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>

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/covid-19-fact-sheet-k-12-exposure-and-quarantine.pdf>

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/covid-19-fact-sheet-k-12-exposure-and-quarantine-flow-chart.pdf>

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.

Ohio | Department of Health

Updates will continue to be provided by the Office of Catholic Schools and the school administrator as needed.

Sincerely in Christ,

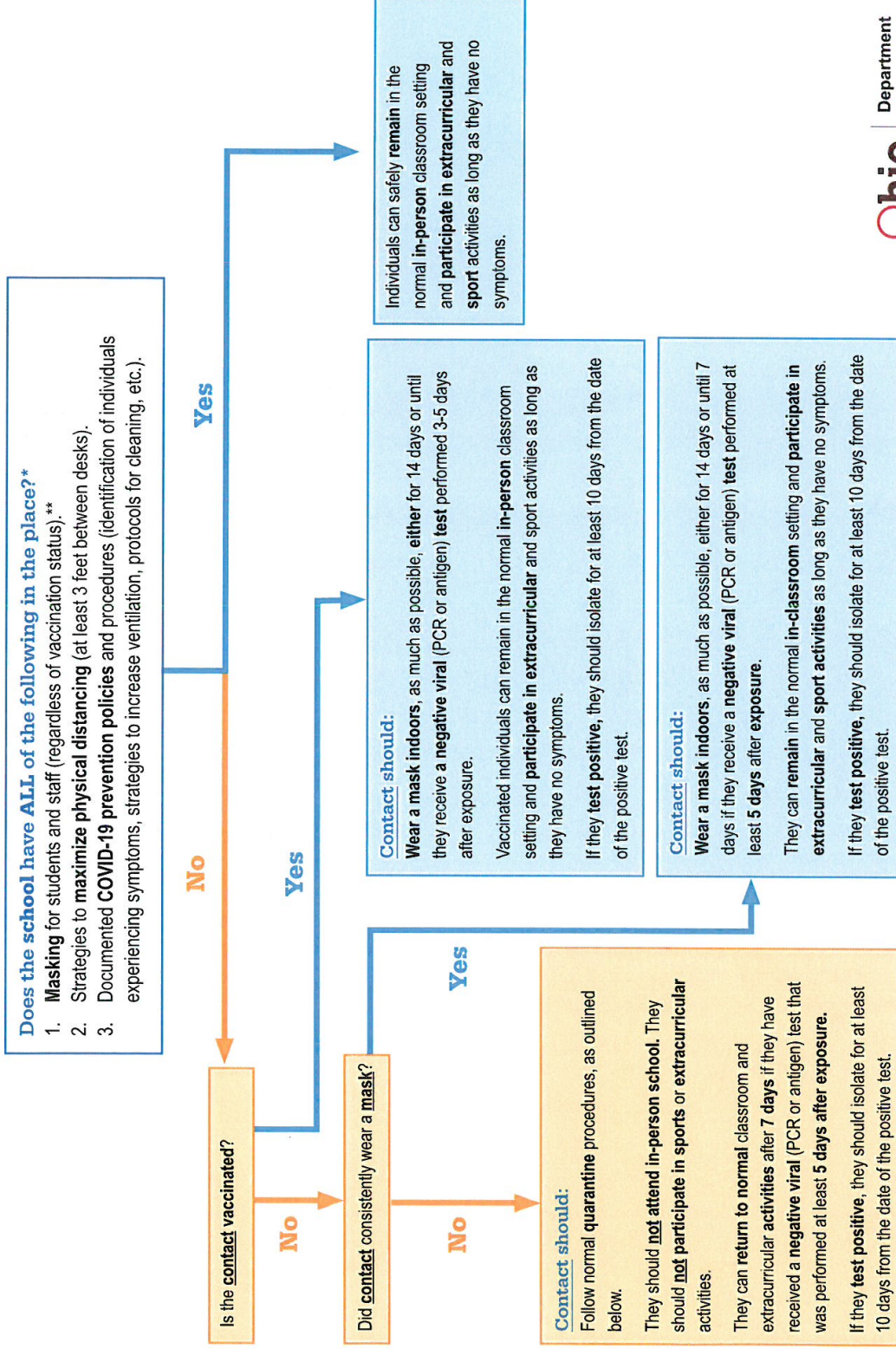
Mary A. Fiala

Mary Fiala Superintendent of Schools

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.



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August 2, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Thanks to the cooperation and work of all of our staff, students, and parents, our schools successfully completed a year of in-person learning in the midst of the pandemic, and we are looking forward to the gifts and blessings this new year will bring.

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 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>

This document outlines the plan for the schools in the Diocese of Youngstown for the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. Our plan for this year continues to be based on multiple strategies that work together to layer protection around our students.

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.

Masks

Masks are recommended by both the CDC and ODH to be worn indoors for individuals who are not fully vaccinated. **Masks may always be worn, and are encouraged. However our DOY schools will not require the use of masks, except in the following instances:**

- Masks must be worn on the school bus, as it is considered public transportation, thus falling under federal law.
- Masks may be required 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.

Considerations

As parents are deciding the masking choice best for their child, we invite you to also consider the following:

- 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; especially if we become face to face with the delta variant.
- 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.

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.

Social Distancing

- Regular occupancy numbers in classrooms, lunchrooms, and other spaces may resume, with adherence to the **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.

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

- **Frequent Hand-Washing**
- **Intentional Cleaning and Disinfection**
- **Attention to improving Ventilation**
- **Public water fountains will remain closed.**

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.

- 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 will need to be shown in order to exempt a person from any required quarantine.

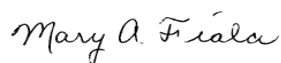
Instruction

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 will only be utilized if a school closure becomes necessary due to health conditions.

More information will be provided by your school. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your principal or to our office if you have any questions.

Thank you for your support of Catholic Schools.

Sincerely in Christ,



Mary Fiala
Superintendent of Schools