



# CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

285 CHURCH STREET • P.O. BOX 120 • CLAY, WEST VIRGINIA 25043  
Telephone (304) 587-4266 • Fax (304) 587-4181 • [www.claycountyschools.org](http://www.claycountyschools.org)

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August 31st, 2023

Dear Clay County Staff, Students, and Community,

The Clay County School System is operating normally for the 2023-2024 school year. Please note that this is subject to change as additional information about the spread and prevention of COVID-19 is known. In addition, directives may evolve as they are received from Governor Jim Justice, public health officials, and the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE). Therefore, all West Virginia County Boards of Education must be prepared to alter their guidance to comply with any new directives to best protect student health and learning needs. For our part, we will make sure staff, students and their families, and the community have access to the most current safe practices and guidance on our website.

We are working diligently to provide a caring, committed, and successful school year.

Respectfully,

Philip R. Dobbins  
Superintendent



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
BUREAU FOR PUBLIC HEALTH  
Commissioner's Office

Sherrri A. Young, DO, MBA, FAAFP  
Cabinet Secretary

Matthew Q. Christiansen, MD, MPH  
State Health Officer

**DATE:** March 18, 2024

**TO:** School Superintendents; School Principals; School Nurses

**FROM:** Shannon McBee, State Epidemiologist  
Bureau for Public Health

**RE:** Updated Respiratory Guidance for Schools

On March 1, 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated their COVID-19 guidelines to streamline recommendations for common respiratory viral illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). The updated recommendations continue to protect those at greatest risk for severe morbidity and mortality. While every respiratory virus does not act the same, adopting a unified approach makes recommendations easier to understand and more likely to be followed. Additionally, we know that many individuals with mild illness do not get tested, therefore they do not know which virus they have.

The updated guidance is applicable to schools across West Virginia and public health officials encourage schools to review and update their current policies and procedures as necessary. The following summarizes the updated guidance as it relates to schools.

- Students and staff who get sick with a respiratory illness should stay home and away from others.
- Students and staff may return to school and normal activities when symptoms have been getting better overall for 24 hours, and if fever was present, it has been gone for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
- Students should not be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities while they are home sick and potentially contagious.
- Once students or staff return to school; they are encouraged to take precautions for the next 5 days to curb disease spread within the school setting including: proper hand hygiene practices, wearing a mask, and keeping distance from others. These precautions are especially important to students and staff who may encounter individuals who are at risk for severe illness including those who are immunocompromised and those over 65 years of age and older.
- Schools are encouraged to continue to promote core respiratory prevention strategies in schools:



- Staying up to date with vaccination to protect students and staff against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.
- Practicing good hygiene by covering coughs and sneezes, washing, or sanitizing hands often, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces in the school often.
- Taking steps for cleaner air, such as bringing more fresh air outside, purifying indoor air, or offering outside classroom time as feasible.
- Schools are encouraged to monitor absenteeism as an early indicator for possible disease transmission within the school. Suspected or confirmed outbreaks of any etiology are immediately reportable to your local health department.
  - Acute respiratory illness outbreaks in an entire school are defined as increased school absenteeism (above 15% or otherwise determined baseline) associated with reported acute respiratory illness or influenza-like illness/laboratory confirmed respiratory pathogens).
  - Outbreak definitions in smaller settings like a single classroom, please see the full outbreak guideline at:  
[https://oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/Documents/ari/Healthy\\_Acute\\_Respiratory\\_Illness\\_Investigation\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/Documents/ari/Healthy_Acute_Respiratory_Illness_Investigation_Guidelines.pdf).
  - For additional guidance on infectious disease outbreaks in West Virginia, please visit: <https://oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/pages/default.aspx>.

While respiratory viruses remain a public health threat, we are in a different place from the beginning of the pandemic. We have more tools than ever before to combat COVID-19, influenza, and RSV including vaccines for all three major respiratory viruses. We are seeing far fewer hospitalizations and deaths associated with COVID-19 and population immunity is at a much higher degree due to vaccination, prior infection, or both.

The health and safety of students across West Virginia is very important, and we will continue to update you on any guidance developed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health. I wish you a happy and healthy spring and summer.