



## Cherokee Nation Public Health COVID-19 Public Health Protocols and Considerations for Schools

### **Position Statement on Public Health Protocols and Considerations for School Mitigation Plans for COVID-19:**

Our position is that the public health protocols and considerations for schools contained in this document should be adopted and actively adhered to by all school districts, while prioritizing the health and safety of all students, staff and families.

The information provided aligns with guidance documents from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE), **Return to Learn Oklahoma: A Framework for Reopening Schools updated August 31, 2020.**

[https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/sites/g/files/gmc786/f/public\\_school\\_reopening\\_guidance\\_covid-19\\_2020aug31.pdf](https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/sites/g/files/gmc786/f/public_school_reopening_guidance_covid-19_2020aug31.pdf) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This guidance should serve as a starting point for school administration and leadership to become aware of key prevention measures that help reduce COVID-19 transmission in the school setting and is subject to revision as new information about COVID-19 becomes known. School administration and leadership should also determine the most appropriate plan and actions based on each school system's unique environment, student population, and needs.

Please note the information that is provided — **does not replace**—any federal, state, local, or safety laws, rules, and regulations with which schools must comply. This information is not intended to replace a school district's emergency or crisis safety plan and is not an exhaustive list of the health and safety needs to be considered

### **Collaboration with Local County Health Departments:**

Cherokee Nation Public Health works closely with the regional directors for the county health departments in our areas. We partner with them to share resources, information, and recommendations. We strive to present a united source of technical assistance and routinely consult with school districts on the reservation. Our goal is to support the growth and development of our children and maintain safe and healthy learning environments. We work



together to support case investigations and contact tracing for COVID-19 in any school setting within our reservation.

### **COVID-19 Local Alert Systems:**

Our position is that school leaders should monitor the various alert systems provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Cherokee Nation Public Health utilizes the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) methodology for determination of alert level metrics by county. Cherokee Nation Public Health provides a dashboard updated daily with the most recent numbers for school decision makers. Our risk level map calculates the 7-day moving average based on daily cases per 100,000 persons and by date reported to the state. Our dashboard is accessible at <https://public.tableau.com/profile/cherokee.nation#!/>. The map displays COVID-19 risk levels for the 14 counties in the reservation. Risk levels are as follows:

- Suppression (Green): Less than one case per 100,000 people- Virus at low levels in the community.
- Community Spread (Yellow): 1-9 cases per 100,000 people – Virus transmitted in the community.
- Accelerated Spread (Orange): 10-24 cases per 100,000 people- Virus transmission widespread in the community.
- Rapid Spread (Red): 25+ cases per 100,000 people- Uncontrolled virus transmission in the community.

Our recommended mitigation measures for each level are consistent with OSDE recommendations with the only difference being Rapid Spread (red) is Orange Level 2 in the OSDE recommendations. Cherokee Nation Public Health remains consistent with the HGHI methodology in our alert levels. Remaining consistent with a globally-respected and evidence-based alert system such as the HGHI affords us confidence in both our understanding of local spread and comparison of counties based on mitigation efforts.



### **Guiding Principles for School Mitigation Planning:**

The objective of mitigation planning is to prepare for when COVID-19 impacts your school based on the following public health key principles:

- 1) Physical Distancing and minimizing exposure:** Physical distancing is a critical tool in decreasing the spread of COVID-19. The more people a student or staff member interacts with, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. A school that focuses on reducing the amount of contact by cohorting (podding) and implementing physical distancing measures will reduce the number of students/staff impacted when a person on your school campus tests positive for COVID-19.
  - **Lowest Risk:** Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.
  - **More Risk:** Small, in-person classes, activities, and events. Groups of students stay together with the same teacher throughout school days and groups do not mix. This is also called “cohorting” or “podding”. Students remain at least 6 feet apart and do not share objects and all persons are wearing a mask.
  - **Highest Risk:** Full sized, in-person classes, activities, and events. Students are not spaced apart, share classroom materials or supplies, and mix between classes and activities.
  
- 2) Face Coverings:** Teach and reinforce use of [cloth face coverings](#). Face coverings may be challenging for students to wear in all-day settings such as school. Face coverings should be worn by staff and students as feasible, and are most essential in times when physical distancing is difficult. Individuals should be frequently reminded not to touch the face covering and to [wash their hands](#) frequently. Information should be provided to staff, students, and students’ families on [proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings](#).

[Cloth face coverings](#) are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. [Cloth face coverings](#) are not surgical masks, respirators, or other medical personal protective equipment.

**Clear face coverings are not face shields:** CDC does **not** recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings because of a lack of evidence of their effectiveness for source control.



<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/cloth-face-cover.html>

Note: [Cloth face coverings](#) should not be placed on:

- Children younger than 2 years of age
- Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious
- Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance

### 3) Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

Teach and reinforce [handwashing](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and increase monitoring to ensure adherence among students and staff.

If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).

Encourage staff and students to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

### 4) Staying Home when Appropriate

Actively encourage employees and students who are sick or who have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 to stay home. Develop policies that encourage sick employees and students to stay at home without fear of reprisal, and ensure employees, students, and students' families are aware of these policies. Consider not having perfect attendance awards, not assessing schools based on absenteeism, and offering virtual learning and telework options, if feasible.

## **Cherokee Nation Public Health Technical Assistance for Schools:**

### • **COVID-19 Case Investigation and Contact Tracing:**

Cherokee Nation Public Health conducts case investigations and contact tracing for positive tests resulted in Cherokee Nation Health Services. Our process is consistent with the Oklahoma State Department of Health's guidance on case investigation and contact tracing. The only difference in our process is that in identification of close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases, we take into consideration the use of appropriate face masks for quarantine purposes. A thorough case investigation takes into consideration all aspects of a particular case and while there are general guidelines each unique situation is evaluated for risk. If a student or staff person from your school tests positive for COVID-19 via Cherokee Nation Health Services,



Cherokee Nation Public Health will do a case investigation and track any close contacts. If we find close contact occurred during any school-related activity whether during regular school hours or extracurricular activity, we will work with your designated point of contact to coordinate notification of exposed persons. We don't disclose the name of the student/staff to school personnel. We do encourage cases/contacts to alert school staff and we will provide quarantine notes for close contacts. We work closely with the county health departments as our cases and contacts are often connected. Should you choose to reach out to your local health department for contact tracing of a case that is reported to you, we will work in concert with the local health department to provide the appropriate assistance and recommendations for your school.

- **Review of School COVID-19 Mitigation Plans**

Cherokee Nation Public Health encourages review of your COVID-19 school mitigation plan by a public health department. The mitigation plan should be a living document subject to change as emerging science related to COVID-19 becomes available and recommendations are updated based on peer-reviewed scientific evidence. The purpose is to minimize the spread of COVID-19 so students and staff can continue in-person learning safely. Your individual school plan should be viewed as the tool to support your administration, faculty, staff and students in ensuring school continues even when positive cases are identified. The goal is not to prevent quarantine, the goal is to prevent an outbreak that forces school closure and contributes to exponential spread. Cherokee Nation Public Health is here to support you in the important work of educating our children and families.

**Contact Information:**

Cherokee Nation Public Health offers technical assistance to schools by either emailing your requests to: [healthyschools@cherokee.org](mailto:healthyschools@cherokee.org) or by calling the Cherokee Nation Epidemiology hotline at 1-539-234-4030.

Cherokee Nation Public Health [www.cherokeepublichealth.org](http://www.cherokeepublichealth.org)

**Links to Evidence-Based Recommendations and Guidance:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Childcare, Schools, and Youth Programs ( <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html> )

CDC: Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs Implementation (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

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CDC: Considerations for Schools (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

Prevent Epidemics Reopening America's Schools: A Public Health Approach  
<https://preventepidemics.org/covid19/resources/reopening-schools/>

Prevent Epidemics: Mask Guidance Playbook  
<https://preventepidemics.org/covid19/resources/mask-playbook/>

Oklahoma State Department of Education Return to Learn Oklahoma: A Framework for Reopening Schools  
[https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/sites/g/files/gmc786/f/public\\_school\\_reopening\\_guidance\\_covid-19\\_2020aug31.pdf](https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/sites/g/files/gmc786/f/public_school_reopening_guidance_covid-19_2020aug31.pdf)