

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS REGARDING RETURN TO SCHOOLS

August 18, 2020

*Thank you to the parents, teachers, staff, and interested community members who participated in the Facebook Live session around schools and submitted their questions in advance. Questions have been grouped by topic and were shared during the session. The schools in Winnebago County have been working over the past 6 months to return to the classroom environment.*

*This will be a challenging year. We will work together to co-exist with COVID to protect the health and safety of our children and the committed school professionals while providing high quality academic instruction. The future health of our community is dependent on it!*

### **Cleaning**

1. Will the students or faculty be responsible for cleaning desks & chairs after each class before students rotate rooms for classes?

**Response:** Cleaning supplies will be located in classrooms. Cleaning of desks and chairs does not need to be routinely done between class changes unless they are eating at the desks. Students and teachers should sanitize their hands upon entry into the classroom and upon exiting. Students may also clean their desk and chair when entering into the classroom.

2. What is appropriate protocol for cleaning buses? Should they be thoroughly cleaned after each route?

**Response:** School buses will be cleaned and disinfected at the start of the shift and after transporting students following CDC Guidelines and using FDA approved List N agents.

3. Has the school hired more staff to aid in the extra cleaning that should be done regularly?

**Response:** Schools have identified the appropriate personnel for cleaning to ensure compliance.

4. If the bus had not been cleaned between routes, would other schools be affected.

**Response:** There are multiple factors including cleaning and length of time between bus trips that might impact additional quarantine requirements.

5. How often should bathrooms be cleaned? RPS has not increased their cleaning crew from Aramark. How will they be able to do their extra deep cleaning when they barely get their regular cleaning accomplished?

**Response:** This has been addressed by RPS School Leadership.

6. What cleaning should be done on a daily basis and with what supplies?

**Response:** Schools will be cleaned and disinfected at the end of the day and will clean frequently touched surfaces throughout the day. Deep cleaning will be performed when there is a positive case.

7. Schools especially RPS205 were not being cleaned prior to covid-19, so there are numerous concerns from parents and staff about this issue. What will the role of WHD in holding them or other districts accountable? Can parents and staff call in complainants to your office?

**Response:** In addition to regular cleaning by the contractor, RPS 205 has installed electrostatic cleaning devices. If there is a case of COVID-19 in the classroom, cleaning procedures will be reviewed. WCHD will not routinely be enforcing cleaning procedures unless there is demonstrated non-compliance leading to infections. Parents and staff should first work with their local school leadership on any deficiencies they have related to cleaning in the school environment.

### **Social Distancing and Cohorting**

8. How is keeping kids in one class, with masks, and 6 feet away from each other helping them socially?

**Response:** The American Academy of Pediatrics in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association have issued a joint position on the important of in-person classroom education. Children and adults are learning to adapt to the concepts of physical/social distancing and masks and part of the classroom experience will be to teach them how to interact socially but safely during the pandemic. Teachers will be instrumental as well as parents/guardians in helping children to adapt and socialize.

9. Why is 48 students per bus (2 per seat) appropriate? How is this actually following 6 feet apart requirements?

**Response:** Current group size is limited to 50. Household members will be seated together and seating charts will be used to understand if there is a contact to a case which children were seated within 6 feet.

10. With 20 kids per classroom, can they keep them 6 feet apart?

11. Will 205 separate kids into pods - small groups of learners who will study and move and eat and socialize together (and separately from other kids) - and make contact tracing possible?

12. Illinois is currently in Phase 4 which allows all gatherings of 50 people or fewer. Roughly 50% of RPS students opted for in-person learning. Due to this, RPS has decided all in-person students will attend school on Mondays and Thursdays. There will be over 800 students in a high school at a time. How will we be able to control exposure, as RPS has said, and how can we allow this many students, not including the adults, in one building at a time when we are in the revitalization phase? Students will all be in the halls at the same time with the only precautions of a mask given. Teachers will see up to 100 students a day. This is not safe for the students and the adults in the building.

**Response:** In settings where 6 feet of social distancing cannot be maintained, children will be cohorted in their classroom. Within cohorted classrooms, there may be smaller cohorts within the classroom. All children and teachers will be wearing face coverings.

13. Can you explain exactly what co-horting means, and how it will work in the classroom? How will this method work to identify students or staff who are in close contact, or need to be quarantined?

**Response:** Cohorting is the “grouping” of students in smaller groups with their teacher and aide. For example, a cohort of 20 3<sup>rd</sup> graders would have their instructional time, recess, bathroom, and lunch time together. In this scenario the maximum number of exposures would be 22. This differs from the past where all 3 classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders of 20 each might have lunch, recess, PE, together which would increase the exposures to 60+. In the middle school, it might involve the teachers moving between the classrooms as compared to the students. The concept is to minimize the number of contacts and potential exposures in a given day. Think about the 15 minutes within 6 feet rule.

14. In most secondary schools there will be 200 students in the hallways or more during passing times. Is that acceptable? For example RESA has 1300 students. Only 600 will be learning in school, but that means each hallway will have approximately 200 students.
15. How are schools safe when we know the virus depends on length of exposure, proximity and larger gatherings? Even with the school plans, distancing is NOT going to happen. Our classes will have 18-20 students in a 24x25 classroom That is not empty from side to side. The math isn’t possible, yet we are telling parents they’re sending children to be 6ft apart. We are putting children together for 6.5 hours a day. This virus will have plenty of opportunity to spread unless I’m misunderstanding the research so far.

**Response:** Exposure is not simply a person function. It is also a function of time spent in the hallway and distance. A passing period typically lasts 7 minutes and students will be masked. Use of hallway lockers is not permitted minimizing the chance of “congregating” or “jamming” up in a hallway. Some schools have additionally staggered change periods to further reduce the number of students in a hallway.

16. Secondary Students are not in cohort groups like elementary classes. They switch rooms every hour. So, if a student comes down with the virus, what students will be quarantined? Kids in all of his classes? Students in desks near his in each of his classes? All of his teachers? Students that sit near him at lunch? Students that sit next to him on the bus? If a teacher has the virus, who is quarantined? All of his students? All 150 of them? Other teachers?

**Response:** If a case is identified in a middle/high school in which students change classes, we will work with the school to obtain the class schedules and seating charts for each class to determine those who was within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes. This would not involve class change periods or teachers. It may include lunch mates and bus riders who were within 6 feet of the child. It is important that teachers be intentional and deliberate in spacing and assigned seating. If a teacher tests positive, we would need to understand the typical work day for that teacher e.g. Driver’s Ed, laboratory sciences, or lecture. Teachers should maintain 6 feet of social distancing as much as possible recognizing that some classes by virtue of the content will engage at a closer distance. Teachers should also remember to maintain this distance when eating their lunch, taking a coffee break, etc. because their masks would be removed.

17. Past practice has been when a sub is not available students are split up and placed in other classrooms. No district seems to have put out any information on whether they have enough subs to cover classrooms especially longer term subs to cover for quarantined staff. Plus based on past

practices subs move around the whole district. Has your office given districts any guidance in this area? Is splitting classrooms up and sending students to other rooms permissible? Is it still acceptable under IDPH school guidelines for subs to be moving throughout the area?

**Response:** Schools have worked on plans to cohort substitute teachers. Splitting up classrooms and sending students to other classrooms defeats the purpose of a cohort. If a teacher is quarantined and not sick/ill, their classroom may be placed on remote learning.

18. We are planning on using the lunchroom for lunch in RPS. The children will be spread out, but clearly the air will be circulated. How is this safe?!

**Response:** The lunchroom seating areas will be spaced out for groups of 50 and no more than 10 students per table to allow for social distancing. The seating areas will be separated. This is consistent with the guidelines that have been in place for Restaurants/Food Establishments.

### **Health Screening and Exclusions**

19. Why are temperatures not being taken before a student enters school or the bus? We can not rely on parents, some already send their kids on medicine hoping they make it through the day.

20. Are bus drivers prepared to refuse transport to symptomatic children? Are schools prepared to assess children each morning? Are teachers able to identify children who should not be at school? Are parents prepared to retrieve ill children? Has this groundwork been established?

21. How is it safe to do spot checks with screening temperatures? Our school is planning on every third child.

**Response:** Ensuring that sick children do not attend school is a shared responsibility of both parents/guardians and the schools. Depending on school plans, children may have their temperature checked before entering the building or entering their cohort. Some schools are also planning random temperature checking. The procedure is dependent on the physical layout of the school, and arrival schedules and methods, with the goal of avoiding congregating of students outside of their bus group or classroom. Bus drivers are not responsible for evaluation of students since they are responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle.

22. When flu season starts, what will protocol be and will it change? Who is in charge of watching COVID rooms at school? Are those people receiving special PPE and changing it if they enter back into regular school area?

**Response:** There will no significant change in protocols when the flu season starts. The school has designated health personnel who will be responsible for the management of any sick child until their parent/guardian reports to school to pick them up. School nurses and school health personnel are being fit tested for N95 masks to wear. They will also wear gowns, face shields, and gloves.

23. Will there be separate areas for kids who are sick but not with COVID symptoms?

**Response:** School nurses/health personnel have designated areas to isolate children with COVID symptoms from those without COVID symptoms.

24. Are schools going to have any more nurses on hand to handle this? How about subs list for teachers and other staff? Is there enough staff willing to teach in person?

**Response:** Schools have identified the appropriate personnel for health and educational instruction including planning for teacher absences.

25. How much has your office helped individual schools in setting up their isolation or lounge rooms? Are you recommending they be staffed by school nurses? Did you help them get the proper PPE including N95 fitted masks? Past practice has been sick children being sent back to classrooms on a constant basis. Parents and staff were concerned about this practice before but with covid-19, it is more concerning.

**Response:** School nurses have participated on separate calls related to management of children/staff who become ill in the school environment with the Health Department. They have set up areas for the evaluation of children symptomatic for COVID-19 from those requiring first-aid or other school nurse functions. Winnebago County Health Department has made arrangements to have all school nurses/health personnel fit tested for N95 masks with our healthcare system partners. Children who exhibit signs/symptoms of COVID-19 will not be returned to the classroom.

26. With so many overlapping symptoms of covid-19 with other illnesses/diseases, could you explain which ones will be used to quarantine staff or students? (I've gotten conflicting information on this. For example, headaches can be a symptom of covid-19 but I've heard if someone suffers from migraines not to quarantine.

27. I have a 13 year old asthmatic child. Will she be forced to take covid test if she has an asthma attack at school?

28. According to the Illinois State Board of Education website "All students and staff sent home with COVID-like symptoms should be diagnostically tested. Student and staff should remain home from school until they receive the test results." Will you be recommending schools following these guidelines??

29. Why are children not required to take a test when being sent home with symptoms? Isn't this just exposing others, including vulnerable teachers?

**Response:** The Illinois Department of Public Health issued Guidance August 17, 2020 that addresses the evaluation with students who are presenting with signs/symptoms that could indicate a case of COVID-19. Students/staff who exhibit any sign/symptom will be isolated for evaluation. Students/staff who exhibit signs/symptoms of COVID-19 are required to isolate until test results are received.

30. Will you be recommending staff gets a covid test prior to the start of school before they return to work?

**Response:** There is no recommendation at present to have staff and/or students tested for COVID-19 unless they are symptomatic. A test is only good for the “day of the test”. It is a point in time.

### **Quarantine and Isolation**

31. What information will be shared with a parent when a child from their school or class shows symptoms? Why are we not requiring tests to be negative to return? Who decides on how many days everyone is at home if someone tests positive or even has the symptoms?

**Response:** There is a standard letter that is used to inform families when their student has been exposed to an infectious disease and the actions required. This differs if these families are close contacts to a case as compared to a general notification that a case has occurred in the school setting. The Health Department will determine the need and duration of quarantine and/or isolation based on CDC guidance. The Health Department will also be responsible to remove isolation and quarantine orders for individuals.

32. If someone who rides the bus tests positive or has symptoms, does everyone from the bus need to isolate?

**Response:** Only those who sit within 6 feet of the individual would require quarantine for 14 days not the entire bus and any household contacts who may or may not ride the bus. The bus would also be deep cleaned in addition to routine cleaning procedures.

33. Has the school hired more staff to aid in the extra cleaning that should be done regularly?

**Response:** Schools have identified the appropriate personnel for cleaning to ensure compliance.

34. What type of masks are the best to wear for students and staff to be safe? Cloth? One time use?

**Response:** Schools will be following the CDC guidance on masks. ISBE with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency will be providing cloth masks and face shields. Masks are used for source control therefore mask with exhalation valves or vents are not recommended. Masks should be washed after each use. Surgical masks or N95 respirators are used by healthcare workers.

35. Why are other larger districts around us opting for all online while RPS is still pushing for in person? Are they fully prepared or should they wait a trimester to be fully prepared? Some departments have not heard any specific information, so how will two weeks be enough time for them to plan it out?

**Response:** Winnebago County Health Department has worked over the past 6 weeks to review the metrics and guidelines. Winnebago County has also been working to become a Trauma Informed Community and has understood the traumatizing effect this impact has had on our community, our families, and our children. Schools also play an important role in addressing equity concerns. It was through this shared vision that we worked together to modify and adapt school environments and curriculum with health and safety protocols against the pandemic to provide our families an opportunity

for in-person education. I cannot address other districts as I am responsible and accountable to my community of Winnebago County.

36. I am sending my kids for in person learning, but concerned, as both my kids have seasonal allergies. Will they be allowed in school, as many of the Covid systems are similar to seasonal allergy symptoms? What determinations will be made for these situations?

**Response:** Parents should make sure that their children's health record is up-to-date including diagnoses and medications. Parents/guardians should make sure that their children have taken medications to control seasonal allergies, asthma, etc. If these are known documented conditions, this will assist the School Nurse/Health Professional in determining the child's individual risk for COVID-19. Be forewarned if your child becomes ill with a symptom of COVID-19, you will be expected to pick them up and have them evaluated by your physician to rule out COVID-19.

37. What are the protocols for students and staff who test positive for Covid19? What are the protocols for those they have come in contact with?

**Response:** Winnebago County Health Department and schools will be following the *Public Health Interim Guidance for Pre-K-12 Schools and Day Care Programs for Addressing COVID-19*. A summary of the procedure is in the School Guidance document on the Winnebago County website [www.wchd.org](http://www.wchd.org).

## **HVAC Systems**

38. Shouldn't schools have upgraded air handling systems before opening? Many schools have windows that don't open or open 3 inches.

39. Does each teacher and classroom and building have the resources that opening safely requires? Michael Osterholm and others have emphasized universal masks, 6 ft at all times, hand washing, AND AIR QUALITY (PURIFIERS / HIGH FUNCTIONING HVAC SYSTEM). Has 205 prepared physically?? Do rooms have air purifiers w HEPA filters?

40. How does the health dept know the ventilation systems in the schools will not spread the virus? Some have windows, and some have no windows. Does the AC spread the virus.

41. Can you address fans and ventilation? I've read the research on this and I'm unsure we are doing what's necessary in schools. We don't have air conditioning, but we have connected heating systems. If they're finding the virus is spreading in hospital ventilation systems, how will this look in schools? Should I have a fan blowing over everyone? I was told to blow it from behind the children. If I'm at the front, is this safe?

**Response:** Guidance has been provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to schools to improve air quality including opening windows as safe with the classroom environment, use of air conditioners with outside air intakes or vents, and increasing fresh air intake into the systems. Fans are permissible but most blow away from faces. Schools have added additional HEPA filtration, UV light system, and ultrasonic cleaning.

42. Would you be willing to send your staff out to schools prior to or after they have started to point out inadequate procedures?

**Response:** We are currently engaged in active response. We have made targeted visits and reviewed specific plans shared by the school.

43. Why won't the entire class have to quarantine for a positive case? I know people I'm close contact at Chrysler have to quarantine when they work near a positive coworker. Why do children not have to do the same?

**Response:** Please review the School Guidance dated July 28, 2020 posted on the Winnebago County Health Department website. This provides an overview of a case investigation and contact tracing.

44. Each RPS 205 building has a separate plan. Will your department be reviewing each school's plan?

**Response:** The Guidance document was developed for schools to use in developing their plans. We have provided additional guidance and/or review as requested by the school.

45. What If a student woke up with a slight fever and parent gave her Tylenol so by the time gets to school her temperature has broken for a bit? Should students be asked questions to screen them as staff takes their temperature? For example, How do you feel? Did you take Tylenol this morning? Does anyone in your family have Covid 19?

**Response:** The question regarding fever reducing medications is included in the self-certifications and symptom review.

46. Are staff and students expected to self quarantine if they have traveled in any of the areas deemed hot spots by IDPH?

**Response:** Winnebago County Health Department has issued Travel Guidance beginning at the end of June and updated every Tuesday. The guidance recommends quarantine based on infection rates relative to Illinois and Winnebago County. Agencies including employers and schools have been encouraged to include this Travel Guidance in their policies related to travel. Please see the Winnebago County Health Department website [www.wchd.org](http://www.wchd.org).

47. If a parent is sent home from work to self-quarantine, are their students expected to stay home under quarantine?

**Response:** It would depend on the case investigation. If the parent/teacher is a household contact to a case of COVID-19, they would be required to quarantine. If the parent/teacher has traveled to a high risk area or is undergoing a medical procedure requiring testing, they would be required to quarantine based on institutional policy. Their classroom/students in these scenarios would not be required to quarantine. These students would be a "contact" to "contact". A substitute teacher would be used in this scenario to teach in-person.

48. If a student is sent home to quarantine, are parents expected to stay home from work and quarantine?

**Response:** If the child cannot stay home alone, a parent should stay home to care for the child. During quarantine, a child may become ill and require care by a parent. Parental supervision is always the best



route when a child is quarantined. This situation is covered in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave.

## **PPE**

49. What PPE specifically is required for the staff & students since social distancing cannot be maintained? Since the classrooms will have up to 20 kids per room, they will be within 6 ft for greater than 15min, it places them in a higher risk situation. RPS 205 - Marshall MS has 70% attending in person. (normal class size 30 @ 70% is 21 students - RPS states it is trying to keep max at 20 students).

**Response:** All individuals in the school setting are required to wear face coverings/masks. When social distancing or cohorting is not feasible, adding a face shield to the face covering/mask adds an additional protection (source control). Certain staff will also be fit-tested to wear an N-95 mask which protects them which can also be worn with a face shield.

50. Will families be informed if someone in their class/cohort has tested positive?

**Response:** There is a standard notification that is sent to families that protects the identity of the individual who tested positive. Students and their families who are close contacts will be notified and provided instruction to quarantine.

51. Who is going to monitor children wearing masks on the bus?

**Response:** Signage will be posted and parents/guardians are responsible to ensure that their child is wearing a face covering/mask that covers their nose and mouth at the bus stop and when entering the bus. The driver will do a visual check and there will be masks provided if a child forgets their face covering/mask. The driver is not expected to monitor this when operating the vehicle between stops.

52. Districts that are supplying masks, did your office help them make selections? Could you go over proper fitting, cleaning, wearing, just procedures that some adults are not even aware of during your press conference?

**Response:** The Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Public Health, and Illinois Emergency Management Agency provided the start-up supply of cloth masks and face shields for the start of the school year. We reviewed guidance from the CDC related to cloth face coverings. Gaiters do not provide adequate protection and are not included in the guidance for this reason. I will work with the Joint Information Center to provide educational materials related to the proper use of masks. There have been multiple posts through our social media accounts and others on how to properly wear face coverings.

## **Manipulatives/Shared Equipment**

53. The teachers I have talked with have gotten no direction from their districts on what they can and cannot have in their classrooms. Are there any recommendations from your office on this subject?

**Response:** Guidance has been included on the use of classroom educational manipulatives and shared equipment in the document dated July 28, 2020 available on the Winnebago County Health Department website.

54. Will drinking fountains still be available for use?

**Response:** Drinking fountains may still be available in some school settings to allow students to refill their personal water bottles other drinking fountains may have been converted to water bottle filling stations. Hydration is important in the school environment especially in the late summer/early fall is important. Regular cleaning of drinking fountains/water bottle filling stations will be done throughout the day.

### **Metrics**

55. What numbers would Region 1 or Winnebago need to exhibit to close schools and do all online learning? Is there a set number or percent?

**Response:** The Illinois Department of Public Health with local health departments is working on regional metrics that will guide decision-making with schools. There is no set number or percentage at the present time. However, Winnebago County Health Department is monitoring the regional metrics of new cases per 100,000 and positivity rate. Outbreaks associated with individual schools will be tracked. The goal is to reduce the risk of COVID-19 while reducing disruption to academics.

56. As a parent, I'm still struggling with the decision of whether to send my children for in-person school and to daycare this fall. Could the WCHD provide more specific information that may inform parents' decision-making, such as case positivity rate by school zone and regional areas of concern that may relate to school zones? Could WCHD also provide the most up-to-date information regarding overall trends for our county, and whether the trends seen in recent weeks are reflective of accurate community transmission, testing capacity, or locations of concern? Could WCHD please also provide information about the availability of testing in our region and turnaround times, as well as the feasibility of broad community testing for students and school personnel?

Thank you for your attention to these questions.

57. At what point would you recommend that a school or all Winnebago county schools close? Is it a certain positivity rate, or so many positive cases in one school??

58. What measures will each school and the district use to decide whether to remain open, to go hybrid, or to go remote? (Certain number of positives? Of students? Of family members? Of District employees? Positivity rate in community? Teachers' feedback on student learning?)

59. What level of illness is ok or not ok for face to face learning. Rps seems to be the largest school district in the state continuing to do daily( elementary) f2f. What data do we have that makes us think we can safely so this when most large districts have realized it isn't safe?

**Response:** Metrics will include the case rate per 100,000, number of positive cases, and the percent positivity. If a school became a location of concern then this information would be shared with the

families and a return to remote learning would be implemented. Illinois Department of Public Health has issued guidance for use throughout the state/region. The additional metric that will be considered is the number of positive cases in youth (0-19 years of age).

60. The numbers of children testing positive for COVID-19 since schools began opening are rising, how many children need to be testing positive for RPS205 to go all online?

**Response:** Any return to remote learning would be dependent on the number of individuals within that school who test positive and their close contacts. Community based metrics including a positivity rate of over 8% for greater than 3 days might result in the closure of schools in addition to bars/restaurants. All schools are prepared to move to remote when there is a need to quarantine due to a case and return to in-person after completing the quarantine.