



OFFICE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION
CATHOLIC DIOCESE of JACKSON

Dear Catholic School Community Members,

As our 2020-2021 school year came to a close, we hoped that our 2021-2022 school year preparations would not include discussions of COVID-19 protocols and mitigation strategies, but as we are seeing a rise of COVID-19 cases across our diocese we must consider the health and safety of all community members.

Throughout the last year, we have learned a great deal about COVID-19 and found ways to operate in-person learning that minimized risk through consistent protocols and expectations for schools and families. We were able to make it through the year with minimal disruption to education because of your commitment to the common good and our community members' health and safety. We attribute the successes of our in-person learning experiences to our schools' fidelity to the protocols that were put in places including masks, social distancing, and increased sanitation and hygiene practices.

In evaluating the current state of all our communities, schools within the Catholic Diocese of Jackson highly encourage the use of masks and face coverings for all students and staff, especially those who have not been vaccinated. Visitors who enter the school buildings, who's vaccination status is unknown will be required to wear a mask. We will continue to monitor case volume and community transmission throughout the year, and we will adjust our protocols accordingly.

As an institution of the Catholic Church, we do ask all families to consider the three essential elements of the common good as outlined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church Paragraph 1906:

1. *Respect for the individual:* As we have learned a great deal about COVID-19, how it is spread, and the risks that it poses, we ask all individuals to not only consider themselves when deciding whether or not to wear a mask but also consider the dangers posed to other individuals who may be more susceptible to the disease.
2. *The social-wellbeing and development of the group:* As we navigate this pandemic together, we encourage all families to consider the risks posed to the entire community and the benefits that many mitigation strategies bring.
3. *Peace:* While the decisions will be left to individuals, we also recognize that decisions will be made throughout the year by individuals, by families, by schools, and by the Office of Catholic Education. We encourage all families to view these decisions through a lens of peace and an assumption of best intentions when they are made.

Included with this letter is our most up-to-date guidance for confirmed cases and instances of quarantine. Should you have any questions, please contact your local school or our office.

Sincerely,

+Joseph R. Kopacz, Bishop of Jackson

Karla L. Luke, Executive Director of School Operations

Stephanie Brown, Director of Curriculum & Development

Guidance for Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 & Other Instances of Quarantine

Overview:

The reality of our current public health situation is that all schools will continue to encounter cases of COVID-19 throughout the year. If this happens, it will be up to the school, in consultation with the Office of Education and local health officials, to determine the best course of action regarding closures, quarantine, and what, if any, additional mitigation strategies should be implemented. This document should serve as a guide in helping school administrators make the best decision for the health and safety of all community members.

If a case is reported in the school community, the following steps should be taken:

The School Will:

1. Contact the Office of Catholic Education
2. Make arrangements for substitute teachers and/or distance learning during the isolation period
3. Assist with identifying close contacts (those who were less than three feet away from the person for more than fifteen minutes)
 - a. Close contacts should stay in isolation for 10 days pending no development of symptoms. Students who do not develop symptoms and receive a negative test result after day five may return to school. Please note, a positive antibody test results will not be accepted.
4. Notify the parents of the class and other exposed students.
 - a. This notification can be targeted based on the group size and number of students and staff members with whom this person was in contact.

Students or School Personnel known to have been in contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19 will:

1. Not attend school or activities for 10 days after the last contact with the infected individual. Students who do not develop symptoms and receive a negative COVID-19 test result after day five may return to school. Please note, a positive antibody test results will not be accepted.
2. Follow the guidelines for student/personnel that have been infected if symptoms develop.
3. Individuals who have been infected with COVID-19 in the past 90 days or individuals who have been fully vaccinated for fourteen days will not be required to quarantine, assuming no symptoms develop.

Students or School Personnel who test positive for COVID-19 and are demonstrating symptoms will quarantine at home and not return to school until:

1. They have been fever-free without fever-reducing medication for at least 72 hours
AND

2. At least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Students or School Personnel who test positive for COVID-19 and are NOT demonstrating symptoms quarantine at home and not return to school until:

1. At least ten days have passed since the date of the positive COVID-19 test, assuming no subsequent symptoms have developed since the positive test result.

Guidance for Vaccinated Individuals

1. Individuals who have received the full dosage of a COVID-19 Vaccine will not be required to quarantine if:
 - a. The individual can present a valid vaccination card noting that all required doses have been administered.
 - b. It has been at least two weeks since the individual received the full dosage (two-doses if required) of the vaccine.
 - c. The individual is not exhibiting any COVID-19 related symptoms.
2. All individuals who have received their COVID-19 vaccine should continue to follow all other recommended COVID-19 guidelines including the use of masks, social distancing, and increased hand-hygiene.

Other Instances that Require Quarantine

1. If a live-in family member of a student tests positive for COVID-19 and the infected individual is unable to isolate from other members of the family, please contact your principal to develop a plan of action regarding quarantine timelines.
2. If a person or family travels internationally or to an area deemed high or very high risk they should follow CDC Guidelines upon returning. It is strongly recommended that the individual:
 - a. Stay home and self-quarantine for a full seven days after travel and get tested with a PCR Molecular Test five days after travel.
 - b. If no symptoms develop following the negative test, the individual may return to the school setting after the seven-day quarantine period.
 - c. If the individual does not get tested, they should stay home and self-quarantine for ten days after travel. The individuals should be excluded from the school setting for the ten days.
 - d. Please note, a positive antibody test result will not be accepted. Please visit the [CDC Travel Recommendations by Destination](#) webpage for the most up to date information regarding high-risk destinations and travel recommendations.
3. If a member of a student or staff member's immediate family is tested for COVID-19, the student or staff member should not return to the school setting until:
 - a. a negative result is reported

OR

 - b. a positive result is reported, and all guidelines for positive cases listed above have been followed.

Decision Tools for School Closures

1. Group/ Classroom Quarantine: If an outbreak occurs (more than three cases within a group), all group members should be quarantined for ten days.
 - a. This strategy may include asking one grade-level or class to stay home for the ten-day quarantine period.
 - b. If this occurs, distance learning measures should be in place to minimize disruption of instruction.
2. Situations that may Merit School-Wide Closure:
 - a. Multiple simultaneous outbreaks (more than one group or grade level is impacted)
 - b. The school encounters difficulty continuing in-person education work due to student or staff absences.

COVID-19 Mitigation Recommendations

1. Social Distancing and Physical Barriers
 - a. Schools should attempt to maintain a distance of three feet between individuals.
 - b. If physical distance cannot be maintained, schools should consider utilizing desk shields or dividers when possible.
2. Cleaning and Sanitation Practices
 - a. To ensure a safe working and playing environment disinfecting should take place regularly throughout the day.
 - b. Additional deeper cleanings should take place at the end of each day.
3. Masks and Increased Hygiene Practices
 - a. Students and teachers should regularly wash their hands throughout the day. Hand sanitizer should be readily available throughout the school, but thoroughly washing with soap and water should be used when students first enter the school, before meals, and before returning to the classroom from outside play or other activities in the building.
 - b. The Diocese of Jackson encourages all eligible students and teachers to be vaccinated but respects the decision of parents and health care providers around the vaccination of individuals 12 years and older.
 - c. Students' vaccination status is only required on a need-to-know basis (i.e., to avoid quarantine if an individual is exposed).
 - d. Students who have not been vaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear a mask when indoors on campus.
 - e. Parents and other visitors who enter the school building whose vaccination status is unknown or who are not vaccinated should wear a mask while on campus.
4. Self-Containment of Classes
 - a. Whenever possible groups of students should remain with the same class or group throughout the day to limit cross contamination and potential exposure if a case occurs.
 - b. Classes may travel to shared spaces and classrooms, but disinfection should take place between groups.