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2023-2024 Norfolk Public Schools' (NPS) Health Mitigation Plan

Introduction

This plan describes how Norfolk Public Schools will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff following the return to full in-person instruction.

For the 2023-24 school year, NPS developed its return to in-person instruction based on guidance from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Additionally, with the implementation of Senate Bill 1303 all school divisions in Virginia were required to offer in-person instruction for a minimum of 180 days or 990 hours.

Maintaining Health and Safety

Norfolk Public Schools continues to take actions to ensure the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff as we continue to address concerns related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. As the metrics associated with transmissibility increase and decrease over time, the division continues to monitor CDC guidance and adjusts mitigation strategies accordingly.

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for all students and employees. In doing so, NPS has asked students and employees to take responsibility for monitoring their own health, including monitoring themselves for potential exposures both in school buildings and in the community.

Key Strategies for Addressing COVID-19 Transmission

- Students benefit from in-person learning; therefore, safeguarding in-person instruction is a priority.
- Mitigation strategies are layered and can be added or taken away depending on CDC guidance, legislative directives, and local COVID-19 metrics.
- Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to limit the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools continue to offer ongoing in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- Comprehensive contact tracing is still a strategy that can be used in certain circumstances. However, due to the lower transmission numbers in the local community, quarantining of an individual determined to be positive, and notification of potential contacts are the primary strategies currently being employed. Comprehensive contact

tracing is still used as a strategy in select cases where multiple positives in a setting are found in a single location, but it will not be used for individual cases.

- As a result of guidance coming from the CDC and legislation created by the Virginia General Assembly, mask usage is now optional for students and staff on school property, except when students or students are coming back from quarantining after 5 days. While mask usage is not required, it is not prohibited either. Students and staff are free to make the decision that works best for them.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing, respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick, getting tested, and cleaning and disinfection are important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- CDC guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households and support in-person learning.
- Localities should monitor community transmission, vaccination coverage, screening testing, and occurrence of outbreaks to guide decisions on the level of layered prevention strategies (e.g., physical distancing, screening testing).

NPS will continue to monitor COVID-19 transmission metrics and continuously update health mitigation strategies to match CDC, VDH and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) guidelines. The usage of various health mitigation strategies is not fixed in place but can be flexed and adjusted to meet the safety needs of our community.

Contact Tracing

Individual staff members/students who are present in school and are suspected of being positive for COVID-19 infection, must be separated from others. A positive employee must notify their supervisor of potential concerns and prepare to leave the office and go home. A positive student must be taken to the school nurse who will notify administration and contact the student's parent to pick the student up from school.

In the instance of a positive COVID-19 case, affected areas in the school and/or the school building will be closed for deep cleaning and disinfection to ensure any areas used by sick/exposed individuals are sanitized. As CDC Metrics associated with COVID-19 infections have recently declined significantly, contact tracing as a mitigation strategy has been relaxed in all school divisions in Hampton Roads and across the Commonwealth of Virginia. NPS will continue to use contact tracing in certain specific circumstances, but in many instances, if a positive case is brought to the attention of the NPS administrator/contact tracer, the positive case will be quarantined and those in close proximity, that might have been significantly exposed to a positive student or staff member, will be notified that they may have been exposed. Parents will be asked to monitor their child for potential COVID symptoms, but a potential exposure will not result in an automatic quarantine. Parents should notify the school if their child does develop COVID-19 symptoms.

Contact tracing **will continue** to be used as a mitigation strategy with individuals in the following circumstances:

- Athletes exposed to a person that is positive that engage in strenuous/aerobic activities in very close quarters.
- Instances where an outbreak is suspected (3 or more related positive cases in an isolated group)

In the above two groups, positive test results or significant exposure to those that are positive will be investigated through the contact tracing process. The process will be used to determine the appropriate level of risk to a student or staff member and if a quarantine is required.

Returning from Quarantine Updates

All individuals that are positive for a COVID-19 infection, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home and quarantine for 5 days. Under the recent guidance, they may return to work for days 6-10 of their quarantine period if they are fever and symptom-free, can wear a mask appropriately, and can maintain 6 feet of social distance from others.

Individuals who continue to have a fever or significant symptoms should continue to stay home during days 6-10 until their fever has resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine and other significant symptoms have resolved.

Individuals that are positive, who are unable to mask, should continue to stay home for days 6 through 10 of the quarantine period.

Optional Wearing of Masks

As a result of guidance coming from the CDC and legislation created by the Virginia General Assembly, mask usage is now optional for students and staff on school property, except when students or students are coming back from quarantining after 5 days. While mask usage is not required, it is not prohibited either. Students and staff are free to make the decision that works best for them.

When students and staff choose to use masks as a mitigation strategy, we recommend a proper fit so that the mouth and nose are securely covered, and the mask remains in place without the constant need for adjustments. Updates to masking suggestions will be provided as new CDC guidelines evolve. Suggestions will be vetted through the VDOE, Norfolk Department of Public Health, and the NPS administration/School Board for potential consideration.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing is not currently a mitigation strategy being promoted in all circumstances, even though it is an effective strategy for reducing incidents of many infectious diseases. As local health metrics dictate, physical distancing could be re-introduced as an active strategy. If a student or staff member is coming back from quarantine due to a Covid-19 (days 6-10), they are required to mask during those days.

Handwashing

Handwashing signs were placed in restrooms describing the CDC guidelines for proper hand washing procedures. Hand sanitizing stations were placed in the main office, at each elevator location, in gymnasiums, and along each serving line station in school cafeterias. Each classroom received hand sanitizing bottles for teacher and student use as well as sanitizing wipes to clean desktops in between each class change. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is available at the warehouse when replacement materials are needed.

Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities

All buildings should be cleaned regularly to assist with the minimization of bacterial, fungal, and viral pathogens. The custodial staff changes HVAC filters every 30 days to maintain efficient air filtering. Additionally, a sanitizing humidifier has been placed in each classroom that does not have mechanical ventilation providing fresh air into the conditioned air. Using CDC guidelines, NPS developed a plan to evaluate fresh air ventilation in each school classroom.

Pre-Screening

All staff, students, and families have received prescreening information to be used daily before reporting to school sites. While the pre-screening process was originally created for use during the Covid-19 pandemic, students and staff should be looking for signs of other infectious diseases that have similar symptoms (RSV, influenza, streptococcal infections).

Daily Pre-Screening Questionnaire

- Are you currently ill or caring for someone who is ill? (YES / NO)
- Do you have any of the following? (YES / NO)
- Fever or feeling feverish
- Chills
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Fatigue
- New loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Sore throat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache

Vaccinating School Communities

Norfolk Public Schools has collaborated with the Virginia Department of Health, the Norfolk Department of Public Health, and local pharmacies to provide vaccination clinics in schools during previous years. Moving forward, access to Covid-19 Vaccinations will be at the Norfolk

Department of Public Health, local pharmacies, and at the physician's offices of students and staff members.

Coordination with State and Local Health Officials

The school division has consistently coordinated efforts in addressing stakeholder needs with state and local health officials through informational meetings and ongoing communication.

COVID-19 Testing

While diagnostic and screening tools are effective tools for monitoring COVID-19 transmission, the CDC and VDH do not recommend **requiring** a negative COVID-19 test for unvaccinated students or staff to return to school.

Vaccine Mandate

While the vaccination of students and staff is not a requirement for attendance or employment, it is highly recommended. Vaccination is a primary mitigation strategy and has been shown to be beneficial for reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

Continuity of Services

Norfolk Public Schools continues to take actions to ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to, services to address the academic needs of students and the social, emotional, mental health, and other needs of both students and staff members.

Social-Emotional Learning

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to all students' social and emotional learning (SEL) needs, which can be described as the focus of helping students to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, develop the ability to feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and be able to make responsible decisions. Mental health needs and behavioral concerns, potentially developing as a result of the pandemic, have prompted school staff members to become more focused on their efforts to support children as they work through processing the stress and confusion associated with the extended closure of schools and the return to in-person learning.

Current efforts to support social and emotional learning include:

- developing an SEL curriculum that will supplement the academic curriculum;
- professional development for all staff members to facilitate an adequate understanding of SEL issues including trauma-informed practices;
- facilitating access to SEL instructional materials and resources through programs for all students, including those with disabilities.
- creating screening instruments for identifying students who are at risk;

- carving out additional time for school level mental health professionals to provide direct support;
- increasing collaboration with appropriate outside agencies; and
- improving the referral process when additional outside resources are needed.

The school division is also refocusing its efforts on the systematic development of a Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) framework. Under the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) umbrella, the PBIS framework facilitates the use of tiered interventions that align with the needs of NPS' students. Multi-Tiered systems of support provided within the PBIS framework include Trauma Informed Care, Restorative Practices, and Social Emotional Learning. MTSS promotes data-driven, proactive layers of support for academic, behavioral, social/emotional, and psychological needs. At the heart of PBIS is a focus on relationship building and the intentional teaching of behavioral expectations. Each school has developed a PBIS plan that will be embedded into the academic program and implemented throughout the school year. The school division's MTSS plan is posted on the NPS website within the Student Wellness Department.

Mental Health

For the provision of mental health services, the Departments of Student Support Services, Student Wellness, and School Counseling will be available to provide mental health support. When mental health service needs rise above what can be provided by the division's mental health support workers, additional support can be recommended through the employee assistance referral process (e.g., EAP, COMP PSYCH) to access services through appropriate community agencies. Additional human resources have been budgeted for the current and upcoming academic year to address the mental health needs of NPS students and staff members (behavior specialists, psychologists, social workers).