To maintain in-person learning and keep schools open, administrators must be able to keep the school environment safe. School-based infection prevention and control (IPC) programs help to reduce the risk of disease transmission and sustain safe in-person learning.

Core functions of school-based infection prevention and control (IPC) programs

Based on Roadmap to Healthy Schools, Building Organizational Capacity for Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), COVID Collaborative. April 2021.

Identify and connect with public health experts to help support school-based IPC teams

- School nurses can serve as liaisons to local health departments.

Form and train school-based IPC teams

- School IPC teams often include school health personnel, instructional staff, principal, janitorial and facility services personnel, non-instructional staff, school community members, including parents, and union representatives.
- The IPC team monitors health and safety practices and identifies areas for improvement and education. They may review and update school safety and facilities measures; assist in IPC training and continued education for staff, parents, and students; communicate feedback and concerns; meet regularly with other teams and school leadership for shared learnings and discussion.

Assess and invest in ventilation and filtration

- Invest in upgrades that provide at least 4 to 6 air changes per hour.
- Open windows and classroom doors, as safety to students permits (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms).
- Consider transportation and extra-curricular settings as well.

Train the whole school community on IPC

- Core components of IPC knowledge include:
  - Infection transmission in adults and children
  - Respiratory protection
  - Hand hygiene
  - Selection and use of personal protective equipment (e.g., eye protection, gloves, and face masks) for source and exposure control
Core components of IPC knowledge, continued.

- Environmental cleaning and disinfection with EPA-approved agents, and training on the use, misuse, and storage of chemicals; importance of following manufacturers’ instructions for use; and ensuring easy access to poison control contacts
- Clean air (ventilation and filtration)
- School logistics, including classroom transitions, recess, food service, hallways, bathrooms, water fountains/bubblers, staff meetings, gatherings, visitor access, sports/extracurricular activities, transportation to and from school, etc.
- Physical distancing
- In addition to these eight components, K-12 IPC training should also include knowledge to support:
  - Hazard assessment
  - Screening of students and staff for symptoms/exposure
  - COVID-19 testing
  - Contact tracing
  - Vaccination communication

Assess the program's impact on the workforce, including changes to duties, etc.

- IPC planning will require additional work, and some of the current duties of those developing plans may need to be transferred to others.
- Additional staff may be necessary to ensure the safe and effective implementation of an IPC program. For instance, changes in class size that are necessary for IPC goals may require increases in educator personnel.

RESOURCES


The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published guidance for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools. The essential elements include:

- Promote COVID-19 vaccination as the primary prevention strategy to end the pandemic. Make COVID-19 vaccination a condition of employment for all school employees.
- Offer vaccines on site for eligible members of the school community, including students as authorized by the FDA, family members, teachers, and staff.
- Adopt universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- Maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk.
- Layer multiple strategies to protect students that are not vaccinated for COVID-19: Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing, respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.