Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Frequently Asked Questions, Week of May 17, 2021

1. **Do students have to wear masks while outdoors?**
   On May 17th, 2021, after consultation with the MA COVID Command Center's Medical Advisory Board, the Governor announced that given the low rate of outdoor transmission of COVID-19, **students no longer have to wear masks when outdoors, even if distance cannot be maintained**. Effective May 18, this guidance update applies to recess, physical education, youth sports, and outdoor learning environments. Adults must continue to wear masks outdoors if distancing cannot be maintained. **At this time, adults and students must continue to wear masks indoors.**

2. **Are students allowed to share objects (classroom materials or art supplies?)**
   On May 17th, 2021, after consultation with the MA COVID Command Center's Medical Advisory Board, the Governor announced that given the low likelihood of surface transmission of COVID-19, schools no longer have to avoid sharing objects. This includes classroom materials, items for physical education, or art supplies. Shared objects no longer have to be cleaned or disinfected between use and should follow the updated cleaning guidance outlined below.

3. **How frequently do schools have to clean spaces or surfaces?**
   Based on CDC guidance and updated information on the low likelihood of surface transmission, schools now only need to clean high touch surfaces (door handles, bus seats, drinking fountains) and shared objects within the school and on school transport vehicles once a day, excluding certain circumstances.[1] If schools are located in an area of high transmission of COVID-19, then they may consider cleaning more frequently, or cleaning **and** disinfecting surfaces and objects once a day. Similarly, for areas where masks are not worn (i.e., lunch areas), schools may consider cleaning surfaces between use. If a surface or object is visibly soiled, it should be immediately cleaned. If someone in the school in the past 24 hours has confirmed to have COVID-19, the spaces (i.e., classroom, bus and lunch area) they were in should be cleaned and disinfected. If disinfecting, ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning products, including storing products securely away from children.

4. **Will the gathering limits for school events with outside participants change this spring?**
   In alignment with state guidance, the gathering limits for school events with outside participants will be lifted starting May 29, 2021. The other health and safety measures, such as masking, distancing, and other protocols, outlined in DESE's Supplemental Guidance for Student Groups and School Events for School Year 2020-2021(*download*) will still apply.

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/clean-disinfect-hygiene.html

5. **As the weather grows warmer, can schools and classrooms use air conditioning?**
   Schools should continue to maximize ventilation and air exchanges in schools and classrooms, even in warmer weather. Schools should target 4-6 air exchanges per hour through any combination of ventilation and filtration by keeping doors open, using portable air purifiers, and/or keeping windows cracked open one or two inches.

   For schools with centralized systems or in-room unit ventilators, they should continue to have those units bring in as much fresh air as possible into the classrooms and increase the level of filtration in the system. Keeping windows open a few inches and doors open for cross-ventilation or using portable air cleaners with HEPA filters are good strategies.

   If individual window air conditioning is used, schools should be mindful that many individual AC units often only recirculate air; they may not provide any ventilation, they may only have low levels of filtration. These AC units can be used but they are not a substitute for achieving the recommended 4-6 air exchanges per hour. Fans may also be used in windows (e.g., facing outwards to facilitate ventilation). Fans should not blow directly on or towards individuals.