



Sparta Township
Public Schools

Safe Return Plan

2023-2024

Sparta Township Public Schools Board of Education

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District Administration**

Dr. Matthew Beck, Superintendent of Schools

Tara Rossi, Assistant Superintendent

Joanne Black, School Business Administrator

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Introduction

The protocols below will be implemented only in the case of a communicable disease outbreak and/or an emergency health-related school closure and are subject to change based on CDC and/or NJDOH guidelines provided at that time.

In June 2021, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) worked collaboratively to develop guidance, The Road Forward – Health and Safety Guidance for the 2021-2022 School Year (The Road Forward) as well as, the August 20, 2021 revisions to the NJDOE's [The Road Forward](#). The protocols contained herein are subject to change if and when the aforementioned authorities revise their guidance.

Communication with Sussex County Department of Health

- STPS will maintain and post an archive of COVID-19 Positive Cases at <https://sites.google.com/sparta.org/21-22-stps-covid-19-dashboard/covid-19-dashboard?authuser=1>
- STPS staff will maintain close communication with the SCDOH in order to provide information and share resources on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and control.
- STPS will establish procedures for SCDOH notification and response to COVID-19 illness in school settings. These procedures may include, but are not limited to:
 - Completing the SCDOH and NJDOE required submissions noting each student and staff confirmed case of COVID-19
 - Notifying the SCDOH and NJDOE via phone or email of confirmed COVID-19 cases

Mask Wearing Protocols

- UPDATE: Effective March 7, 2022 the wearing of masks by students, staff and visitors will be optional.
- While Sparta Township Public Schools will be making masks optional for all students and staff beginning March 7, 2022, we reserve the right to pivot to requiring masks under the following conditions:
 - During periods of high community transmission (Orange or Red on CALI)
 - During an active outbreak
 - When illness occurs in school and students await being picked up by a parent/guardian (mask provided by school)
- Masks are no longer required on school buses, effective March 7, 2022
- Masks are not required outdoors

Physical Distancing and Cohorting Protocols

- STPS will promote physical distancing to the greatest extent allowed.
 - Each school will strive for 3 feet of social distancing.
Understanding that 3 feet of distance at all times is a challenge to achieve, the other health and safety measures detailed in this document will provide additional measures for the health and safety of our students.
 - When feasible, students will remain in consistent groups throughout the day, which is helpful when contact tracing needs to be performed.
 - Students will be seated in rows with all desks facing in the same direction in their classrooms.
 - If seating arrangements deviate from this format, physical barriers (dividers) may be used.
 - All teachers and bus drivers are required to maintain seating charts.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette Protocols

- Students and staff will be encouraged to regularly wash and sanitize hands throughout the school day.
- Students and staff will be encouraged and reminded to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue during the limited instances when individuals might not be wearing a mask.
- The district will continue to maintain adequate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette supplies.

Provision of Meals

- STPS will continue to implement layered prevention strategies to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in cafeterias or other group dining areas. This will include to every extent practicable:
 - implementing “grab and go” lunches to prevent interaction between students, staff, and food
 - distancing as much as possible in school cafeterias
 - allowing options to eat lunch outside when practicable and when weather conditions permit

- *In the event of an emergency school closure of a duration of three or more days, meal distribution plans will be communicated to the school community to ensure meals are provided for families. These plans will include pickup and/or delivery of meals to students who qualify.*

Transportation Protocols

- Masks will be required on school buses at all times unless and until NJDOE and NJDOH guidelines recommend otherwise, at which time optional masks will be considered
- Seating charts will be maintained for buses to every extent practicable
- When conditions permit, windows will be opened on buses to allow for optimal air circulation

Cleaning, Disinfection, and Airflow

- All of our schools will follow standard procedures for cleaning and disinfecting with EPA-registered products for use against SARS-CoV-2.
- On a daily basis, at minimum, the district will continue to clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched often; such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys at least daily.
- Measures will be taken to improve airflow to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants.

Screening, Exclusion, and Response to Symptomatic Students and Staff Members

- Screening for Symptoms- Daily screening of students and staff will no longer be implemented. It is the responsibility of all parents and guardians to monitor their children for signs of illness every day. Students who are sick shall not attend school. Parents and guardians are encouraged to reach out to their respective school nurses to inform them of their child’s symptoms and reasons for absence.

- District staff will be responsible for monitoring their own health and shall not attend school when they are sick. All staff are encouraged to reach out to their respective school nurse or building administrator if they are absent due to experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

- Symptomatic Students and Staff- Procedures will be in place to identify and immediately respond to a student or staff member who becomes ill in school with symptoms consistent with COVID-19. As was the case last year, there will be a designated and supervised area for students and staff who are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19 to be held until they can be safely sent home.

- Parents should not send students to school when they are sick. Staff should not attend school when they are sick. NJDOH recommends that students and staff experiencing the following symptoms be promptly isolated and excluded from school. The table below outlines exclusion criteria where TWO symptoms from Column A or ONE symptom from Column B constitute immediate exclusion.

Column A (any two symptoms)	Column B (any one symptom)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fever (measure or subjective) ● chills ● rigors (shivers) ● myalgia (muscle aches) ● headaches ● sore throat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cough ● shortness of breath ● difficulty breathing ● new olfactory disorder ● new taste disorder

- nausea or vomiting
- diarrhea
- fatigue
- congestion
- runny nose

The following COVID-19 exclusion criteria for persons who have COVID-19 compatible symptoms or who test positive for COVID-19 will be implemented:

- Ill individuals with COVID-19 compatible symptoms who have not been tested or individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 should stay home until at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset and at least 24 hours have passed after resolution of fever without fever reducing medications and improvement in symptoms.
- Persons who test positive for COVID-19 but who are asymptomatic should stay home for 10 days from the positive test result.
- An alternate diagnosis (including a positive strep test or influenza swab) without a negative COVID-19 test is not acceptable for individuals who meet COVID-19 exclusion criteria to return to school earlier than the timeframes above.

Note: During periods of low community transmission, ill individuals excluded for COVID-19 compatible symptoms who are not tested **and do not have a known COVID-19 exposure** may follow [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school.

- The following COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria for Close Contacts will be implemented:
 - CDC released guidance with options to shorten the quarantine time period following exposure to a confirmed positive case. While CDC and NJDOH continue to endorse 14 days as the preferred quarantine period– and thus the preferred school exclusion period – regardless of the community transmission level, it is recognized that any quarantine shorter than 14 days balances reduced burden against a small possibility of spreading the virus.
 - To that end, excluded individuals who are close contacts of

staff or students who tested positive for COVID-19 may be considered for a reduced exclusion period based on community transmission levels as follows:

- High (**orange**): Exposed close contacts should be excluded from school for 14 days
- Moderate or Low (**yellow** or **green**): Exposed close contacts should be excluded from school for 10 days (7 days with negative test results collected at 5-7 days)

Exposed close contacts who are fully vaccinated and have no COVID-like symptoms:

- Do not need to quarantine, be excluded from school
- Must mask for 14 days or provide a negative test when tested 3-5 days from exposure
- Should still monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure
- If they experience symptoms, they should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing and inform their health care provider of their vaccination status at the time of presentation to care

Contact Tracing

- Contact tracing is a strategy used to determine the source of an infection and how it is spreading. Finding people who are close contacts of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, and therefore at higher risk of becoming infected themselves, can help prevent further spread of the virus. Per the CDC, a close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with suspected or known COVID-19 for 15 or more minutes during a 24-hour period.
 - Note: As per 8/21/21 updates to NJDOE Road Forward, in the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.

- School staff will identify school-based close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases in the school. Schools will assist in identifying the close contacts within the school and communicating this information back to SCDOH.
 - With guidance from SCDOH, our schools will be responsible for notifying parents and staff of the close contact exposure and exclusion requirements while maintaining confidentiality.

- SCDOH contact tracing team will notify and interview the close contacts identified by the school and reinforce the exclusion requirements.

Remote Instruction for Quarantined Students

- In accordance with mandates from Governor Murphy, and the NJDOE, remote instruction shall not be a district-wide option for the 2021-2022 school year. The NJDOE acknowledges that there will be specific circumstances where students will be required to quarantine in accordance with NJDOH guidelines “where an individual student, group of students, or entire class(es) are excluded from school due to meeting the NJDOH’s COVID-19 exclusion criteria, LEAs are strongly encouraged to immediately provide virtual or remote instruction to those students in a manner commensurate with in-person instruction.” It is under ***these conditions only*** that STPS will provide temporary remote instruction to students while they are required to quarantine.

- [Remote Learning Plan](#)

- The combination of synchronous and asynchronous instruction will meet the 4-hour daily minimum requirement for instruction (excluding lunch and recess)

- For students who have insufficient broadband internet access the district will provide Wi-Fi hotspots or arrange for broadband services

- For students who do not have access to sufficient technology required for virtual learning, the district will provide Chromebooks or laptops. Arrangements will be made with individual students as needed or announced to the community if/when large-scale closure(s) is required

- [Emergency Virtual Closing Plan](#)