October 15, 2020

COVID-19 and School Re-Opening

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

This document aims to answer common questions about school re-opening and COVID-19 and share resources to learn more.

Common Questions and Answers:

Who decides when our school can re-open?

- The decision to re-open sits with the local school board. The State expects school boards to use the guidance from Washington State and the local health officer. Local health officers are responsible for controlling the spread of diseases like COVID-19. They have the authority to close down schools to control the spread of COVID-19 if necessary.

How does the school board and district decide if our students can return to school?

- Washington State published guidelines school districts should use to decide about returning to school. Included in the guidelines is a *Decision Tree for Provision of In-Person Learning Among K-12 Students at Public and Private Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic* and recommendations that school districts work with local health officers to make re-opening decisions. The school district and school board use the decision tree, advice from local health officers, feedback from the community, re-opening committee, and teachers and staff to make decisions about re-opening. You can download a copy of the decision tree here.
- The decision tree guidance (Figure 1.) includes several measures and corresponding risk levels schools should use to make re-opening decisions. These measures include:
    - Level of COVID-19 activity/cases – the number of cases per 100,00 people over 14 days.
    - COVID-19 test positivity rate.
    - The number of hospitalizations for COVID-19.
- The measures determine the risk level: Low COVID-19 activity, Moderate COVID-19 activity, or High COVID-19 activity.
- The risk level informs the options for returning to school.

COVID-19 Activity Level	Education Modality*	Extracurricular
HIGH **>75 cases/100K/14 days** Other considerations: • Increasing trend in cases or hospitalizations • Test positivity >5% • Other health and education risks and benefits to children and their families	Strongly recommend distance learning with the option for limited in-person learning in small groups, or cohorts, of students for the highest need students, such as students with disabilities, students living homeless, those farthest from educational justice, and younger learners.	Strongly recommend canceling or postponing all in-person extra-curricular activities, including sports, performances, clubs, events, etc.
MODERATE **25–75 cases/100K/14 days** Other considerations: • Increasing trend in cases or hospitalizations • Test positivity >5% • Other health and education risks and benefits to children and their families	Recommend distance learning as described above. In addition, consider expanding in person learning to elementary students. Over time, consider adding hybrid in person learning for middle or high school students if limited COVID transmission occurs in schools.	Strongly recommend canceling or postponing all in-person extra-curricular activities. Consider low risk activities when all students have some level of in person learning.
LOW **<25 cases/100K/14 days**	Encourage full-time in person learning for all elementary students and hybrid learning for middle and high school. Over time and if physical space allows, consider full-time in person learning for middle and high school.	Consider low and moderate risk in person extra-curricular activities.

Figure 1. Decision tree for school re-opening

Why have elementary students returned to school part-time, but secondary students (grades 7-12) have not returned?

- The State decision tree and public health office guidance strongly recommended starting in-person education for elementary students first, slowly expanding in-person offering, aligned with the decision tree risk criteria.
- Children under the age of 18 make up less than 9 percent of all COVID-19 cases, less than one percent of all deaths, and 1 percent of hospitalizations.
- Some data show children under the age of ten have significantly lower susceptibility to infection.
- The school district is currently working on a plan to expand in-person education for elementary and secondary students. The ability to expand in-person education is dependent upon the number of COVID-19 cases, the test positivity rate, and hospitalization rate. If Cowlitz County moves back up into the high-risk category for three consecutive weeks, we would not be able to continue to expand in-person education, and existing in-person education may stop.

When will students return to in-person school full-time?

Our ability to bring students them back full time depends upon the level of COVID-19 activity (as outlined above), and the State's physical distancing requirements – practices to minimize close contact (less than six feet) with other people. Today, we do not have adequate space to return to school full time while also meeting the State's physical distancing requirements and maintaining high-quality instruction. If/when the physical distancing requirements decrease, we should be able to bring more students back full time.

The school district is working on bringing 7-12 students who chose in-person education back for hybrid education – they will have some days in class on campus and some virtual education days. Full-time virtual education will continue for students/families who chose that delivery method.

Where can I find information about Cowlitz County's COVID-19 activity

Cowlitz County publishes a weekly COVID-19 School Data Report. You can find the reports here. More COVID-19 information is available on the County's website.

Have students been exposed to COVID-19 at school?

Students attending in-person education and teachers/staff are screened for COVID-19 symptoms daily, including temperature checks. Students, teachers, and staff wear masks, practice social distancing, and are in small groups to minimize potential exposure risk. There are no confirmed COVID-19 cases related to in-person education at the Toutle Lake School District.

What happens if my child is exposed to COVID-19 at school?

Cowlitz County Health and Human Services Public Health department performs contact tracing – a process to identify people who may have come into contact with an infected person – for all COVID-19 cases. Public Health contacts exposed individuals to discuss exposure and give guidance for self-quarantine. If a person is determined to be a close contact of a known case of COVID-19, they will be directed to self-quarantine at home for 14 days to keep themselves and others safe. If your student is required to self-quarantine, you can work with the school to continue education at home (if possible, the students potential health needs should come first).

Why is there a 14-day quarantine when symptoms may last longer?

Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 2-14 days, with an average of around five days. The quarantine period starts from the last known exposure.

If a student has COVID-19, when can they return to school?

Symptomatic persons (those with symptoms) can stop isolation when at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, AND after 24 hours have passed since the resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement of symptoms which may exceed the 10 days since symptoms first appeared.

Asymptomatic persons (those with no symptoms) can stop isolation when at least 10 days have passed since the positive laboratory test AND the person remains symptomatic. Asymptomatic persons who test positive and later develop symptoms should follow the guidance for persons with symptoms.

I have more questions about re-opening the school. Who can answer my questions?

You can call or email:

- Superintendent Bob Garrett, bgarrett@toutlesd.org. 360-274-6182.
- Principal Jerry Johnson for elementary students, jjohnson@toutlesd.org. 360-274-6142.
- Principal Chris Byrd for secondary students, cbyrd@toutlesd.org. 360-274-6132.
- The re-opening committee, reopening@toutlesd.org.

You can also check the school district webpage for updates.