



Diocese of Laredo Office of Catholic Schools COVID Protocols for Catholic Schools 2022-2023

Creating a healthy, safe, faith-based environment has always been the foundation of Catholic school culture and educators will once again be on the front line to provide social, emotional and academic support for students. The Diocese of Laredo with guidance from the health department, has considered that currently, Webb County is identified to be at a 'Low' COVID- 19 community level of infection.

Schools will follow a ***Layered Prevention Approach*** as a deterrent to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus and its variants to include the following practices:

Cafeteria

The school administration has the discretion to allow all students to dine-in the school cafeteria. The 3-foot distance between students is no longer required. This decision is based upon the current low COVID infection rating in Webb County. Distance between students and /or eating in the classroom for elementary students will be reinstated if an outbreak were to occur. Automatic hand sanitizer dispensers will be made available at the entrance of each school cafeteria.

Communication

- School to Community

Your school will inform you as soon as a change is noted for our schools via one or all of the following: electronic communication, written announcement, voice/text message and/or website publication.

- Community to School

If the family has traveled out of Webb county, upon the return of the student to schools, parents need to inform the child's teacher. Communication is most important for the tracking and tracing of possible infections. Participation in activities such as sporting events, play dates, parties, social and family gatherings, music or theater performances, and other events where they may come into contact with other people.

Distance Learning

Students with symptoms of the COVID virus are urged to stay home and get tested for COVID-19. Staying home when sick can lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 to other people. Our schools will continue to prioritize in-person learning; however, in consideration of students that are ill or in quarantine, distance learning will remain an option. Parents must make the request and seek approval from the school's principal. Reminder: Students will be responsible for the same academic standards as those students that are physically present in their respective classrooms.

Masks

Although the CDC continues to recommend indoor masking in K-12 schools for all students 3 years of age and older, universal masking for teachers, staff and visitors regardless of vaccination status, is optional at all Catholic schools. Anyone who chooses to wear a mask will be respected in their decision to do so at any of our schools. At times, school principals may need to require masking to decrease the chance of classroom contamination of students with immunocompromising conditions.

PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)

Personal protective equipment will be made available to anyone requesting its use. A table will remain at the entrance of each school with masks, gloves, sanitation wipes and hand gel for public use. These same materials will be made available to each classroom for teacher and student use. Mask usage by anyone is optional; however, their decision is to be respected by all adult staff members and students within the school.

School Sanitation and Student Hygiene Practices

Campus administrative staff will continuously monitor and sanitize restroom facilities. All frequently touched surfaces such as desktops, keyboards, telephones and doorknobs will be sanitized at the end of each school day. Desk shields will continue to be encouraged for use at their respective school.

Washing hands may prevent the spread of the COVID virus therefore, teachers and staff will continue to educate students on the importance of hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. School personnel will monitor and reinforce these behaviors, especially during key times during the instructional day (i.e. before and after eating, use of the restroom facility and after recess). Each school will provide adequate handwashing supplies, including soap and water. If washing hands is not possible, schools will provide hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol and will be used with adult supervision for children 5 years of age and younger. Students will also be taught how to sneeze and cough into their arms to prevent any bodily fluids from spreading into the immediate surroundings.

Sports & Playgrounds

Students are encouraged to participate in school sports activities. The benefits of physical activity include:

- Development of self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills
- Improved academic performance
- Reduced risk of diseases and illnesses
- Enhanced emotional well-being
- Making and building friendships

According to the CDC, outdoor sports offer the safest venues due to the open-air factor. However, indoor sports activities include not only the athletes, but the parents, spectators, officials, etc. Therefore, gymnasiums may pose a risk for all attendees due to the number of individuals in close proximity. It will be the responsibility of parents to have students protected through vaccinations prior to athletic competitions. Coaches will have the option to closely monitor school sports team athletes by asking for their vaccination status and through periodic COVID Surveillance Testing of students.

Elementary School Playgrounds will be available to all students during their designated school schedules. Teachers and staff will ensure sanitary procedures are followed after the use of this area of physical exercise.

Surveillance Testing

Thanks to the generosity of local health agencies, schools have been provided with an ample supply of COVID tests. Schools will periodically test staff, student groups (i.e. school clubs, athletic teams, etc.) or individual students with COVID Rapid Tests to track any possible viral contamination within

campus. Should there be any positive cases, these will be reported to the Health Department immediately for purposes of contact tracing. Parents of students in close proximity of the infected child will be notified within 24 hours of the case identification.

Vaccinations

This is the most important recommendation made to all school staff and parents of Catholic school children! Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations is the leading health strategy to prevent the spread of this illness in schools. Not only do vaccinations provide individual-level protection, but high vaccination rates among students reduce the chance of infection to others at home and in the community.

All Catholic school staff have been vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus; parents are urged to do the same and have their child(ren) vaccinated and up to date with any applicable boosters. Schools will support parents to work with the student's attendance and academic requirements as needed. In addition, the school will aid families to connect them with off-site vaccination locations.

Water fountains

Since all students of school age have access to the COVID vaccine, school water fountains will now be re-opened. Although students are encouraged to continue to bring in their own water bottles from home, students may make use of these stations. They will be sanitized on a regular basis by the school's custodial staff.

NOTE:

We continue to follow the guidance provided by our local health and safety experts on the reporting and the quarantine of close contacts with COVID cases identified within our schools. As of the writing of these protocols, the contamination rate in Webb County is low, however, this plan remains fluid and may be modified by the school principal to reflect stricter measures to safeguard the health of their individual school community.

These protocols are based upon recommendations from our local health authority, Dr. Maurice Click, Dr. Richard Chamberlain, Director for the Health Department and have the approval of Bishop James A. Tamayo, D.D.