

Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations for Fall 2020

July 24, 2020

Introduction

As a supplement to DESE's [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#) (*download*), we are providing districts and schools with guidance for the following in-school classes which require additional safety considerations this fall:

- **Arts: Chorus, band, theater, dance, and visual arts**
- **Physical education**

This document also provides guidance on shared equipment for these and other courses, including materials for art classes, computers, and, for younger students, toys like building blocks.

This guidance is being released in late July 2020 and may be revised as we continue to monitor COVID-19 trends and the latest medical research.

We will issue additional guidance on vocational/technical classes, extracurricular activities, school performances, competitions, and large gatherings.

Please note: Detailed guidance on youth sports will likely be issued in early August. A taskforce with representatives from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA), the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), and infectious disease physicians and other public health experts, is working to identify guidelines for youth sports and how youth sports can be played safely this fall. Currently, MIAA has approved September 14, 2020 as the start date for any fall sports that will be allowed to play under the forthcoming state guidelines.

Importance of the arts and physical education

The arts, physical education, and other enrichment courses are an integral part of the learning experience for every student at every grade level. We strongly encourage schools and districts to continue providing these classes to students this fall.

Adaptations to these courses, however, are necessary to support the safety of students and staff. Even though these activities require additional logistics, we are confident that they can and should continue this fall, as outlined in the following pages.

In this document, we focus on guidance for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures due to increased respiration or sharing of equipment, and we include guidance specific to each type of course. These guidelines are designed to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

Core health and safety practices

In our Initial Fall Reopening Guidance, we put forth the goal of the **safe** return of as many students as possible to in-person school. **This requires us to establish a new culture of health and safety in our schools this fall. It is not one mitigation strategy, but a combination of several strategies that will substantially reduce the risk of transmission.**

The core health and safety strategies are summarized below. For more detailed information, please see other DESE guidance, including the [Initial Fall Reopening Guidance](#) (download) and [Facilities and Operations Guidance](#) (download).

- **Stay at home if not well.** All students and staff should stay home if they are not feeling well, have any COVID-19 symptoms, or are in a household with someone who has recently tested positive COVID-19.
- **Masks are among the most important measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.** We require all staff and students second grade and above to wear masks, and younger students are strongly recommended to wear masks.
- **Physical distance greatly reduces the risk of transmission.** In general, 6 feet is the recommended distance between individuals where feasible. The minimum distance required is 3 feet, which is medically permitted when wearing masks.
- **Hand hygiene is critical.** We require frequent handwashing or hand sanitizing.
- **Create cohorts and assign seats.** As feasible, cohorts of the same students taking part in the same activity should be created. Smaller cohorts are preferred when feasible.
- **Maximize ventilation.** For the courses and activities outlined in this guidance, ventilation, including holding classes outdoors, can be an important consideration.

General guidance for courses requiring additional safety considerations

Courses that require enhanced health and safety measures

Chorus, singing, brass or woodwind instrument use, physical education activities, dance, and theater require enhanced health and safety measures, because they may involve increased respiration.¹ Research into optimal ways to maximize safety in these types of activities is ongoing. As a result, in consultation with our medical advisors, our guidance at this time is intentionally conservative and recommends modifications to minimize these elevated risks.

We strongly encourage these courses and activities be held fully or partially online if possible. If they are held in person, we strongly encourage – and at times require – these activities to occur outdoors. Safety requirements for these activities are as follows:

For chorus, singing, musical theater, and using brass or woodwind instruments:

- **If outdoors, with masks encouraged if possible,** these activities can occur with at least 10 feet of distance between individuals.
- **Note: At this time, these activities are not permitted indoors.**

For non-musical theater:

- **If outdoors, with masks encouraged if possible**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **If indoors, with masks required**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **Note: These activities cannot occur indoors without a mask.**

For physical education activities and dance:

- **If outdoors, without masks**, these activities can occur with 10 feet of distance between individuals.
- **If outdoors, with masks required**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **If indoors, with masks required**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **Note: These activities cannot occur indoors without a mask.**

Courses that involve regular sharing of equipment

Many courses and activities use equipment and materials that are regularly shared between students, including music, visual arts, and physical education. The sharing of equipment and materials (e.g., building blocks, computers) is permitted with the following modifications.

Require students to wash hands, wear masks, and maintain distance

- Students should wash or sanitize hands before and after using equipment;² frequent handwashing is likely the best way to protect against transmission from surfaces.
- Ideally, students must be 6 feet apart. When wearing masks, 3 feet is the minimum distance allowed between students (seat edge to seat edge). Masks must cover the nose and mouth and be on at all times if students are less than 6 feet apart or using shared equipment.

Minimize and modify shared equipment usage

- **Consider lesson plans that minimize the use of shared equipment.**³ If feasible, reduce class sizes for classes requiring equipment to reduce the need for equipment sharing.
- **If feasible, procure additional pieces of equipment in order to limit sharing.** This may not be possible for more expensive equipment (e.g., cameras) but may be possible for other types (e.g., some art supplies).
- **Assign specific students to specific pieces of equipment or workstations** (e.g., computers, art stations) that they can use for each class session. This is similar to having assigned seats in classrooms so that specific students are always near the same other students.

- **If there is not enough equipment for each student to have their own, consider creating cohorts, e.g., having students work in pairs or small groups** and keeping those groups the same.
 - One student can physically touch the equipment (e.g., camera) and the other students can play roles that do not involve physically touching the equipment (e.g., arranging items to be photographed).
 - If it is possible for the students to wipe down/clean the equipment part of the way through class, students can switch roles. Otherwise, students can swap roles in the next class session.
- **Equipment that touches the eyes or mouth (e.g., cameras) can be shared if a disposable protective cover is added** and students do not directly breathe into the item (for example, woodwind instruments cannot be shared). Disposable protective covers should be removed, disposed of and replaced with a new cover between uses, and the equipment should be cleaned between uses by students or custodial staff.
- **Instruments that do not come into contact with the mouth (e.g., piano) can be shared** if cleaned by students or custodial staff between uses. Woodwind or brass instruments (e.g., flute, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet) cannot be shared.
- **Do not share equipment or objects that are hard to clean and disinfect** (e.g., any materials with fabric or irregular surfaces such as stuffed animals or playdough).⁴

Increase shared equipment cleaning

- **Shared equipment should be wiped down before and after each use** (so there are ideally two wipe-downs between each student's use). Students or custodial staff could wipe down/clean equipment as appropriate.
 - An [EPA approved disinfectant](#) should be made available in each room for this purpose. Sufficient inventory of disinfectant supplies should be maintained at all times.
 - Teachers play an important role in proper equipment hygiene. In the classes in which students wipe down/clean their own equipment, teachers should demonstrate how to properly wipe down/clean equipment, reinforce the importance of this practice, and supervise cleaning to ensure it is done correctly.
 - Post signage in all areas with shared equipment reminding students to wipe it down/clean it before and after use.
- **Additionally, shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily** as part of building cleaning schedules. Frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handles, buttons) should be cleaned multiple times a day.^{5 6}

Specific guidance by type of course

Chorus and singing instruction

Singing carries a relatively higher risk of virus transmission because voice projection generates respiratory droplets.⁷ Chorus and singing must use the guidance for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2.

- Consider what mask types may be most comfortable for singing and whether these masks can be provided to students.⁸
- When outdoors, staff should monitor student volume to prevent harm to students' vocal cords.
- Consider pursuing musical pieces that are at a lower volume. The lower the volume, the less projection required. Consider, also, the volume of any background music. The higher the volume of background music, the more vocalists will need to project to be heard.
- All students should face in one direction instead of facing one another. Avoid singing in a circle or semicircular formation.
- Students and teachers should avoid sharing materials (e.g., music stands) when feasible. Any sharing of equipment should follow the equipment sharing guidelines on page 3.
- When it is not possible to continue with singing instruction based on the guidelines on page 2 – for instance, when activities cannot be held outdoors due to inclement weather or in colder seasons – courses could focus on other aspects of music instruction, such as history of music, music theory, or vocal anatomy. These courses could also be conducted virtually.⁹

Theater

Singing and voice projection, both common in theater, carry a relatively higher risk of virus transmission.¹⁰ Musical and non-musical theater courses and activities must use the above guidelines for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2.

- Intentionally select artistic works that may facilitate reduced in-person interaction, such as those that involve smaller casts or that are easily rehearsed outdoors.¹¹ As one example, Concord Theatricals has created a [list of such works](#).¹²
- Avoid sharing equipment as feasible. Any sharing of equipment, including props, set pieces, rails, and voice amplification equipment, should follow the equipment sharing guidelines on page 3. Do not share makeup or anything that comes into close contact with mouth or eyes (e.g., microphones). Avoid sharing costumes and wigs.¹³
- Any rental equipment should be thoroughly disinfected upon receipt and before returning and regularly cleaned and disinfected, as with other equipment.

Band and the use of musical instruments

As is the case for chorus and singing, some musical instruments carry a relatively higher risk of virus transmission. Instruction for brass and woodwind instruments must follow the guidelines for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2.

- As noted earlier, instruction for musical instruments that require air blowing (e.g., flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, trombone) can only occur outdoors when individuals are at least 10 feet apart. These instruments should never be shared.
- Instruction for musical instruments that do not involve air blowing (e.g., strings, percussion, piano) may continue indoors or outdoors as long as health and safety requirements are met. If needed, these instruments can be shared between students in accordance with the above guidance on shared equipment on page 3.
- Students should be encouraged to clean their instruments regularly, especially the mouthpiece and high-touch surfaces, such as finger pads.
- For cleaning guidelines specific to each instrument, the National Federation of State High School Associations, the National Association for Music Education, and the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation have published [COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines](#).

Dance

While dance does not typically involve vocalization, it is a physically intense activity, similar to physical education, and can result in an increased risk of transmission due to increased respiration. Dance courses and activities must use the guidelines for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2. In addition:

- Prioritize forms of dance that allow for adequate distancing;¹⁴ dances reliant on close-proximity partners must be adapted to maintain physical distancing requirements.
- All sharing of equipment should follow the shared equipment guidance on page 3.
- Keep music at a volume that minimizes the need for the instructor to project their voice.

Physical education

This section contains guidance for physical education classes during the school day. With physical activity, individuals tend to breathe more heavily and speak louder, which increases the potential for dispersal of respiratory droplets. Physical education classes should follow the guidance for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2 and equipment sharing on page 3 and follow these guidelines:

- No physical education classes can have activities with close physical contact.
- Physical education should prioritize activities that do not require shared equipment. For example, consider agility training exercises, bodyweight strength training (such as push-ups), yoga, track and field, running, step aerobics, or racquet activities (as long as racquets are disinfected before and after use).
- Prioritize outdoor activities, whenever possible.

- Students should wash or sanitize hands before and after physical education. Particular attention should be paid to washing and sanitizing hands before and after masks are removed and put on, if applicable.
- No sharing of water bottles, towels, mouth guards, helmets or other equipment that comes into contact with the nose or mouth is allowed.
- If feasible, close communal areas, including athletic locker rooms. If not feasible, stagger locker assignments and access such that students who need to use lockers at the same time (e.g., those in the same physical education class) will be able to maintain physical distancing. Athletic locker rooms should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily.
- As part of the school cleaning/disinfecting protocols, frequently clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces (e.g., any equipment used) between uses and at least daily.

Visual arts

Visual arts courses and activities may involve the sharing of specialized equipment among students, such as paint brushes, paints, and cameras. Visual arts courses and activities must follow the guidance on equipment sharing on page 3.

Additional suggestions for visual arts courses and activities include:

- Pay particular attention to adding disposable protective covers to shared cameras and any other equipment that requires close eye or mouth contact.
- Adapt curricula when feasible to avoid expensive equipment (such as printers) that students need to share.
- Prioritize activities that require minimal supplies, such as sculpting clay, or create individual art kits with assigned supplies (e.g., colored pencils, markers) to use for the semester.
- Emphasize any elements of courses that could involve outdoor time such as drawing outdoors or nature photography.
- Change the focus of activities to avoid shared equipment use (e.g., switching a visual art class from screen printing to a focus on charcoal drawings where individual supplies can be used each class).
- Assign small student groups, e.g. create cohorts, at the beginning of the semester for visual arts courses which last for the entire semester. For example, consider assigning one student per camera to a photography assignment, with other students studying a famous photographer for one unit, and then switch these groups of students for the next unit.

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- ¹ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ² Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ³ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ⁴ CDC, [Considerations for Schools](#). (2020, May 19).
- ⁵ CDC, [Considerations for Schools](#). (2020, May 19).
- ⁶ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ⁷ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ⁸ Consider masks such as those available here: <https://www.broadwayreliefproject.com/singersmask>
- ⁹ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ¹⁰ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ¹¹ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
- ¹² Concord Theatricals, [Innovative and Flexible Show Selection for the 2020-21 School Year](#). (2020, June).
- ¹³ Educational Theater Association, [Recommendations for Reopening School Theatre Programs](#). (2020, June).
- ¹⁴ Dance USA, [Return to Dancing and Training Considerations Due to COVID-19](#). (2020).