



Benton and Franklin Counties Guidance for Reopening to Classroom Instruction

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The decision to reopen classroom instruction requires a complex analysis of risks against the profound benefit of classroom instruction, especially for young and at-risk students. Our understanding of COVID-19 transmission is continually developing, as is our understanding of risk mitigation around classroom instruction. Both reopening for in-person learning and not reopening for in-person learning in schools create risks to the students and their families, to educators and their families, to the economy, and to the health of the broader community. This decision requires selecting the most appropriate of multiple less-than-ideal options.

As of this date, based upon best available evidence, the Health Officer for Benton and Franklin counties supports the following approach, which reflects Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) guidance:

- Schools are critical to the infrastructure of our community. Therefore, schools and educators are considered “essential businesses” and “essential workers.”
- Incorporation of social-emotional learning and mental health supports into both distance-learning and in-person instructional models.
- Prioritize students most impacted by a loss of in-person services for in-person learning.
- Provision of and education on proper use of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment for staff and students to minimize risks during in-person learning.
- The risks of classroom instruction increase and decrease with the community prevalence of COVID-19. Preparation of various educational strategies to allow for transitioning between distance-learning and in-person learning throughout the school year as community disease activity changes.
- Continuous partnership between BFHD and schools/districts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the school environment, while minimizing disruption of the learning environment. In accordance with WA DOH decision tree for reopening schools, BFHD supports:
 - A return to in-person classroom instruction through a hybrid approach with COVID-19 precautions, when the county incidence of COVID-19 is less than 75 new cases per

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100,000 and greater than 25 new cases per 100,000 for 14 days for two consecutive weeks.

- A return to in-person classroom instruction for all student populations, with COVID-19 precautions, when the county incidence of COVID-19 is less than 25 cases per 100,000 over 14 days for two consecutive weeks.
- BFHD utilizes data from the WA State Risk Assessment Dashboard, but is also able to compile data at a local level to reduce the processing time and lag in reporting. -These sources will be utilized to determine recommendations on reopening.
- Thresholds may need to be adjusted due to disease activity trends or other metrics of disease prevalence (health system capacity, testing capacity, percent positive, disease severity, etc.).

COVID-19 outbreaks in school

- Outbreak definition: Two or more laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff with onsets within a 14-day period, who are epidemiologically linked, do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing.
- In case of an outbreak:
 - Schools will work with BFHD to determine if transmission is occurring in the school. The following will be considered to determine the need to close a school and switch to remote learning for 14 days when:
 - There is a rapid increase in cases
 - A prolonged chain of transmission (two or more outbreak generations) is believed to occur in the school.
 - School cannot function due to insufficient teaching or support staff.

COVID-like illness (CLI)

- Exclude and test all students or staff with CLI or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Criteria for return to school if ill (outbreak guidance supersedes):
 - If PCR testing for COVID-19 is not performed, stay home for at least 10 days after symptom onset, and at least 24 hours after fever has resolved and symptoms are improving (people with severe disease or immunocompromised may need to be isolated at home for longer).



- If PCR testing for COVID-19 is negative, stay home until 24 hours after fever resolves and symptoms are improving.
- If PCR testing for COVID-19 is positive, stay home for at least 10 days after symptom onset, and at least 24 hours after fever has resolved and symptoms are improving.
- If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, BFHD will work with the appropriate school or district to identify close contacts and ensure quarantine procedures.
- Requesting a medical provider to “clear” someone to return to school outside of this guidance is not recommended.

Contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19

- A person who believes they have had close contact to someone with COVID-19 should not go to work, childcare, school, or public places for 14 days after the last date of close contact. During that time:
 - Watch for signs of fever, cough, shortness of breath, and other COVID-19 symptoms during the 14 days after the last day they were in close contact with the person sick with COVID-19.
 - If a person develops symptoms of COVID-19 during their quarantine, they should seek testing for COVID-19, and follow guidance above for confirmed COVID-19 cases.
- A negative test after exposure does not shorten the 14-day quarantine period.
- Requesting a medical provider to “clear” someone to return to school outside of this guidance is not recommended.

Masking/face coverings

- All students, volunteers, or guests must wear cloth face coverings at school when indoors. In rare circumstances when a cloth face covering cannot be worn, students and staff may use a clear face covering or a face shield with a drape as an alternative to a cloth face covering. If used, face shields should extend below the chin, to the ears, and have no gap at the forehead. Requests to exempt from this rule must:
 - Include specific diagnosis by a licensed medical or behavioral health provider to justify exclusion
 - Recommend alternative droplet retention method, or if none, recommend exclusion from school



- Be approved by Health Officer or their designee
- The use of face coverings does not eliminate the need for physical distancing of six feet

Data reporting

School districts will be responsible for recording the following data for both students and staff:

- Staff and students reporting or showing COVID-19 symptoms (suspect cases)
- Staff and students reporting being tested for COVID-19
- Close contacts of suspect cases

School districts will be responsible for reporting the following data to BFHD:

- Positive cases
- Close contacts of positive cases

