



Oak Park Elementary School District 97 Back-to-School Plan for 2021-22

Last revised: Aug. 31, 2021

Overview

On July 9, 2021, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) fully adopted [the guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools during the 2021-22 school year. The IDPH guidance recommends many school-based mitigation strategies as safety measures for staff and students. The CDC and IDPH state that schools should work with local public health officials to determine the prevention strategies needed in their area.

In response to CDC and IDPH guidance, District 97 has developed a comprehensive back-to-school plan designed to keep our students and staff healthy and safe while they learn in person five days a week. Our approach implements data-informed response measures that are aligned with the most up-to-date scientific research and best practices for K-12 schools. The plan also reflects rising concerns about the transmissibility of the Delta variant, the resurgence of COVID-19 cases, and the fact that the majority of our students (Pre-K through sixth grade) are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Per CDC/IDPH guidelines, decisions regarding the management of positive COVID-19 cases, contact tracing and quarantine were made at the direction of the Oak Park Department of Public Health.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve quickly, as does the guidance from the CDC and our state and local health departments. The mitigation strategies in this plan are based on the conditions and guidance that exist at the time. If conditions change, the interim superintendents are authorized to revise our procedures to address the changed conditions. We will continue to prioritize the health and well-being of our students, staff and families, and will keep the community informed of any updates.

COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies

IDPH and CDC recommend [various mitigation strategies](#) for schools to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The IDPH guidance also allows for school districts to remove specific prevention strategies based on local conditions ([community transmission](#) and [local vaccine coverage](#)). District 97 will work with the Oak Park Department of Public Health to monitor the status of COVID-19 in the community and determine which of the strategies set forth below are appropriate in a traditional model of in-person learning. The district will also continue to track our internal metrics (positive cases and individuals in quarantine) to determine the effectiveness of our school safety protocols.

Community conditions, school-based outbreaks and health department guidance will inform whether mitigations are removed or added. When mitigation strategies are to be removed, it will happen one at a time. Any mitigation strategies that are removed from District 97 schools will be communicated to families, staff and the community.

Masking

When teachers, staff, and students who are not fully vaccinated consistently and correctly wear a mask, they protect others as well as themselves. Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and in crowded settings, when physical distancing cannot be maintained.¹

Based on the [recommendations of the CDC](#) and the Oak Park Department of Public Health, as well as the community metrics (COVID-19 transmission and vaccine coverage) as of Aug. 1, 2021, District 97 will begin the 2021-22 school year with the mask requirements outlined below. The district maintains the ability to reassess and pull back this mitigation as conditions warrant.

Indoor: District 97 will begin the 2021-22 school year with mandatory universal indoor masking for all students and staff, regardless of vaccination status. This decision was made based on a number of factors, including but not limited to:

- Having a student population that is not yet eligible for vaccination (Pre-K through sixth grade).
- Increasing or substantial or high COVID-19 transmission within the school or their surrounding community.
- Difficulty monitoring or enforcing mask policies that are not universal.
- Awareness of low vaccination uptake within the student, family, or teacher/staff population or within the community.

Outdoor: Because we cannot guarantee consistent physical distancing outside, masks will be required for all students and staff during arrival, dismissal and recess. However, there will be designated zones for students and staff to take socially-distanced mask breaks.

Transportation: Per CDC/IDPH mandate, all students who ride a bus must wear a mask at all times during transportation. This includes transportation to and from school and for school-related activities.

General Guidelines Related to Face Coverings

- Language or pictures/depictions on face coverings may not interfere with the educational environment and, therefore, should not be offensive, provocative, or disruptive to instruction.
- The face covering should cover the mouth and nose. It should be tight-fitting, but the user should be able to breathe and speak easily.
- Bandanas, masks with valves and gaiters are not allowed as they allow for leakage of aerosolized droplets.

- Staff and students will be educated on the wearing and use of masks/face coverings, including using signage from the Centers for Disease Control. The [CDC Use of Face Coverings](#) provides helpful explanations about the use and care of face coverings.
- District 97 expects all students and staff to bring and wear their own cloth or disposable masks whenever possible and appropriate. Anyone who forgets their reusable mask will be provided a disposable mask to wear on the bus and within the school building. If possible, students should keep a second cloth mask with their belongings.

Physical Distancing

Based on studies from the 2020-2021 school year, the CDC recommends that schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing, to reduce transmission risk. District 97 will make every effort to maintain as much distance as possible between students (at least 3 feet), understanding that classroom configuration, capacity and class size may vary.

Cohorting

Cohorting will be applied in our elementary schools as much as possible. However, starting this year, students will be permitted to travel to special classrooms. Students will be allowed to participate in small group instruction and/or instruction in resource classrooms.

Screening/Testing

Screening/testing for COVID-19 is not mandatory but it is strongly recommended for the 2021-22 school year. In K-12 schools, screening testing can help promptly identify and [isolate](#) cases, [quarantine](#) those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 and are not fully vaccinated, and identify clusters to reduce the risk to in-person education.

SHIELD Testing

As a preventative measure, District 97 will partner with SHIELD Illinois (University of Illinois) to provide weekly PCR screening testing to all students (Pre-K through eighth grade) during the 2021-22 school year. This is a non-invasive saliva test that will be conducted on site during the school day. Results will be available to parents/guardians and District 97 within 24 hours.

Each school's testing schedule will be communicated by building principals. Additional information about SHIELD testing is included below.

- [About SHIELD Illinois](#)
- [District 97-SHIELD Illinois Program Notice](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Testing has been effective because it allows for the identification of pre-symptomatic individuals, which allows for isolation before they can “shed symptoms” and infect others. Testing is just one protocol that can help keep the staff and students safe and to prevent interruptions in the continuity of instruction. Given concerns about the Delta variant and the fact that the majority of our students are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine as of August 2021, the SHIELD program will provide an additional layer of protection for our schools by helping the district promptly identify and isolate positive cases. The program will also provide reassurance to families at no cost—testing will be covered by the State of Illinois and will be completed during school hours (no appointments required).

Participation in SHIELD testing **is not mandatory (families would need to opt out)**, but the program could be expanded in response to school outbreaks. Families can opt into or out of testing at any time. To opt out of weekly PCR testing, please complete the [SHIELD Opt-Out Form](#). By sending your child to school without opting out of the testing program as described below, you consent for your child to be tested for COVID-19 infection and to have the results and related information shared with District 97 and public health authorities consistent with IDPH guidance and the Illinois Control of Communicable Disease Code.

NOTE: Participation in SHIELD testing does not exclude a student from quarantine requirements should they be identified as a close contact.

Confirmatory PCR Tests Following a Positive SHIELD Test

Following the guidance of the Oak Park Department of Public Health, District 97 will not accept outside/confirmatory PCR tests following a positive SHIELD test. This is based on the fact that the SHIELD Illinois saliva test is laboratory-based nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), which is considered the most sensitive test for detecting SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

According to SHIELD, the saliva testing has a sensitivity of 97% and a specificity of 99.8% to 99.9%, yielding very few false positives. Additionally, all positive samples are retested using the originally-collected sample to further reduce the chance of false positives. High specificity combined with frequent testing makes the SHIELD saliva-based test extremely accurate.

Furthermore, the [Illinois Department of Public Health](#) states the SHIELD Illinois saliva test is highly-reliable and does not require an additional confirmatory test when used as a primary diagnostic test.

Daily Symptom and Temperature Screenings

District 97 will discontinue daily temperature screenings and CrisisGo health screenings that were previously used for students and staff.

As of Aug. 12, 2021, [updated guidance from ISBE/IDPH](#) states, “Both the [Centers for Disease Control] operational guidance for K-12 schools and this joint guidance no longer recommend fever and symptom screening by school staff upon arrival at school. Instead, self-screening for COVID-19-like symptoms, as well as any other symptoms of common respiratory viruses and ailments, prior to arriving on school grounds or boarding school transportation continues to be recommended.”

District 97 will continue sending frequent communication to encourage employees and students to stay home when they feel sick, have tested positive for COVID-19 or are showing COVID-19 symptoms, or have recently had “close contact” with a person with COVID-19, including any household member (see below, *Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested*).

Ventilation and Air Quality Standards

District 97 will continue to follow industry standards for indoor air quality, and will remain diligent with regular maintenance to ensure that all systems are performing at optimum levels. Outdoor air will be circulated as much as possible. Certain activities, including recess and snack breaks, may take place outdoors, when possible.

Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

Students and staff will practice handwashing and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) to keep from getting and spreading infectious illnesses, including COVID-19. Schools will monitor and reinforce these behaviors and provide adequate hand washing supplies, including hand soap and hand sanitizer. Staff will assist students with handwashing at several points in the day.

Cleaning and Disinfection

District 97 custodians are trained and ready to do their part to keep all of our buildings safe and clean. In addition to performing their regular cleaning protocols, staff will disinfect high-touch surfaces daily. The full classroom disinfection process will be performed weekly, in accordance with CDC recommendations.

Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested

Staying home when sick is essential to keep COVID-19 infections out of schools and prevent spread to others. It also is essential for people who are not fully vaccinated to quarantine after a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19. Getting tested for COVID-19 when [symptoms](#) are compatible with COVID-19 will help with rapid contact tracing and prevent possible spread at schools.¹

District 97 requires staff and students to stay home when they feel sick, have tested positive for COVID-19 or are showing symptoms of COVID-19, are waiting for the results of a COVID-19 test, or if they are unvaccinated and a “close contact” of a positive or probable case of COVID-19.. Parents/guardians must ensure that their children are symptom-free before sending their children to school. Symptoms that

should be monitored daily by District 97 staff, families and students are:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Contact Tracing, Isolation and Quarantine

Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine, is used by health departments to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. In general, contact tracing involves identifying people who have a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 (cases) and people who they came in contact with (close contacts) and working with them to interrupt disease spread. This includes asking people with COVID-19 to [isolate](#) and their contacts to [quarantine](#) at home voluntarily.²

Per IDPH guidance, the local health department (Oak Park Department of Public Health) is the final authority on identifying close contacts and determining who is to be quarantined and for how long.

Close Contacts

For teachers, staff and adults in the indoor K-12 classroom setting, CDC defines a [close contact](#) as an individual not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. According to the new CDC close contact definition, classroom students who were within 3 to 6 feet of the infected student are not treated as close contacts as long as both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting mask and the school has implemented other prevention strategies. In other words, only classroom contacts within 3 feet require quarantine—even if both the case and the contact were consistently masked. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.

If students are not consistently masked (e.g., during lunch), then close contacts will be defined as those who were within 6 feet of the infected student for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. In general, individuals who are solely exposed to a confirmed case while outdoors should not be considered close contacts.

NOTE: The infectious period of close contact begins two calendar days before the onset of symptoms (for a symptomatic person) or two calendar days before the positive sample was obtained (for an asymptomatic person).

Isolation and Quarantine

At the direction of the Oak Park Department of Public Health, those who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or who tests positive for COVID-19, must quarantine/isolate from school for a period of 10-14 calendar days (see below, *Returning to School from Quarantine*). Fully vaccinated individuals who remain asymptomatic and those with documented COVID-19 infection within the past 90 days are excluded from quarantine. However, individuals who are identified as a close contact and are vaccinated must remain out of school if presenting symptoms. Additionally, due to the transmissibility of the Delta variant, [IDPH and CDC now recommend](#) that fully vaccinated individuals get tested three to five (3-5) days following a close contact exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

All individuals will be required to submit proof of COVID-19 vaccination to the school nurse in order to avoid quarantine after being identified as a close contact.

In compliance with ISBE regulations, any student under quarantine order by the state or local health department will be provided remote instruction to ensure continuity of education (see below, *Remote Learning for Quarantined Students*).

***NEW in 2021-22: Returning to School from Quarantine (updated Aug. 30, 2021)**

For the 2021-22 school year, the Oak Park Department of Public Health is offering school districts two quarantine options for close contacts in order to support students being in school as much as possible: 1) 14 days, or 2) 10 days, with mandatory testing on days 11, 12, 13 and 14. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 are required to isolate for at least 10 days, per the IDPH exclusion guidance.

Although District 97 intends to utilize the 10-day option for close contacts this school year, we are temporarily moving to a full 14-day quarantine requirement, effective Aug. 30, 2021. This decision was made based on a number of factors, including the rate of transmission locally and statewide, and the fact that the district—at time of publication—had not yet implemented one of our key safety mitigations, weekly SHIELD testing.

Outbreaks

The Illinois Department of Public Health defines an outbreak as "two cases that are linked epidemiologically with respect to person, place, and time. In other words, the two cases have shared close contacts and location and have onsets within 14 calendar days of each other." Two cases that occurred in different time frames (at least calendar 15 days apart), separate locations, and having no common source of exposure would not constitute an outbreak." This would prompt an investigation by

the Oak Park Public Health Department that may result in recommendations for control measures to mitigate the outbreak (e.g., testing and quarantining all students/staff in the affected classroom).

Travel Restrictions and Quarantine

District 97 will continue to follow the direction of the Oak Park Department of Public Health, per IDPH guidelines, regarding travel restrictions and quarantine requirements. As of the issuance of this plan, the Village of Oak Park adopted the [travel advisory](#) issued by the City of Chicago and the Cook County Department of Public Health. The advisory includes recommendations; there are no current mandates for individuals who travel. This guidance is subject to change based on the level of community transmission.

Remote Learning for Quarantined Students

Per ISBE regulations, remote learning must be provided only if a student is placed in quarantine by the state or local health department. A student may be placed in quarantine/remote learning for a period of 10 to 14 calendar days (see above) if they test positive for COVID-19 or have been identified as a close contact. Students who are sick or absent for reasons unrelated to confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases, as determined by the local health department, will not be permitted to participate in remote learning.

In collaboration with the Oak Park Teachers' Association (OPTA), District 97 has created a remote learning plan for 2021-22 that seeks to provide support and continuity of education for all quarantined students. Our goals were to minimize instructional loss, ensure that all students have opportunities for continued learning that focuses on critical standards, and provide routines and structures that allow students to stay connected to schools and learning during quarantine.

Specific details of the remote learning plan, including instructions and expectations, are forthcoming.

Remote Learning: General Overview

- Students who need to temporarily quarantine would receive virtual instruction directly from a building-specific substitute.
- If students participate in remote learning during the quarantine, those days will not be counted as absences.
- Teachers would provide lesson plans to the permanent remote learning substitute and student work assigned via grade-specific LMS tool.
- Students would have a Zoom link to attend with the permanent remote learning substitute every quarantined school day for instruction and support.

- Students classroom teachers would collaborate with the permanent remote learning substitute and review/grade student work and tests as they are assigned during the quarantine period.
- Principals will meet with and support the permanent remote learning substitute.

Medically Fragile Students

We will offer the medically fragile students two hours of remote learning after school. We will follow the same procedures previously implemented for homebound students with an increase of one hour.

School-Based Protocols

School-specific safety protocols and procedures will be communicated by building principals. This includes, but is not limited to: plans for arrival and dismissal, transitions, lunch and recess, bathroom breaks, etc. Below are a few general guidelines for all District 97 schools.

Field Trips

Field trips will remain virtual. However, schools may move forward with certain trips, such as outdoor education trips for fifth-grade students and the Washington D.C. trip for eighth-grade students.

Lockers

To start the 2021-22 school year, students will not have access to hallway lockers or P.E. locker rooms. The district will revisit this strategy later in the school year, in consultation with school principals and the latest public health guidance.

Lunch

District 97 will maintain at least 3 feet between students during lunch. The locations will vary by school and will be determined by principals based on space, seating, etc. Schools must use a seating chart to support contact tracing when needed.

Students will remove their masks to consume lunch. Students will not be allowed to engage in conversations during this time.

School lunch will be available each day and is available to all students at no charge. **Any food that is brought to school must be nut-safe.**

Visitors and School Gatherings

District 97 will continue to limit visitors and large gatherings inside our school buildings, at least for the beginning of the 2021-22 school year. The district maintains the ability to re-evaluate this mitigation as conditions warrant.

School-Sponsored Gatherings and Meetings

- Events such as curriculum nights, open houses and school assemblies will continue to be held virtually.
- Back-to-school events may be held outdoors with the following safety mitigations in place:
 - Masking: Consistent with [the village's current guidelines for masking](#), individuals must wear masks outdoors if they are not able to maintain at least 6 feet from other individuals not from the same household, a recommendation that applies to playgrounds and other recreational spaces.
 - Physical Distancing: Attendees should maintain as much distance as possible, even while outdoors (at least 3 to 6 feet).
 - No Food: Food will not be permitted on site for any events or celebrations.
- School-sponsored sports will resume this fall. Further details are forthcoming.
- Staff meetings may be held in person, depending on each school's physical capacity and their ability to adhere to safety protocols. If meetings are held in person, staff should be given the option to attend virtually. Staff members who attend virtually must be on site.

Visitor Guidelines

As a means of keeping students and staff healthy and safe, visitors—including parents or caregivers—will not be allowed to enter District 97 school buildings for any purpose other than to drop off or pick up their student(s), all of which will be limited to the school's administrative space. This restriction does not apply to District 97 staff with a business purpose to be at a school site or vendors necessary for providing school services. All vendors must adhere to the requirements for masks and physical distancing.

Outside Organizations

For the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, District 97 will not allow outside organizations or vendors to utilize our buildings. The community will be notified should this mitigation change.

Child care providers that utilize District 97 schools for their programs, such as Hephzibah and By Discovery, will continue to operate on site with safety mitigations in place. Families should contact programs directly for details about 2021-22 programming.

Water Bottles

District 97 will continue to utilize drinking fountain safety covers to restrict fountain use. All schools have touchless water stations that will remain operational. Students and staff are encouraged to bring their own water bottles to school each day.

COVID-19 Monitoring

Following the IDPH/CDC guidelines, District 97 will monitor community transmission rates and vaccine coverage for Oak Park on a weekly basis to determine the level of layered mitigation measures needed to safely continue in-person learning. We will also monitor positive cases at each of the district's 10 schools.

Data Sources

- [Village of Oak Park COVID-19 Status Report](#): This report, currently sent out every Wednesday, provides a summary snapshot of the COVID-19 situation in Oak Park, including the case incidence rates for Oak Park and Cook County, detailed case information on the youth population of Oak Park, and the community's current vaccine coverage.
 - The Oak Park Department of Public Health utilizes the CDC's definitions for [levels of community transmission](#), which refers to the total new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days (low, 0-9; moderate 10-49; substantial, 50-99, high, ≥ 100) and percentage of positive tests in the past 7 days (low, $< 5\%$; moderate, 5-7.9%; substantial, 8-9.9%; high, $\geq 10\%$).
- [COVID-19 Data Tracker by County](#): Suburban Cook County positivity rate, published by the CDC.
- [District 97 COVID-19 Dashboard](#): Updated every Friday with the total number of reported COVID-19 cases each week, as well as the total number of students and staff who are reported to be in quarantine as of each Friday.

Communication and COVID-19 Case Reporting

Notification of a Positive Cases and District Dashboard

District 97 will continue to provide notification to appropriate staff and families regarding confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our schools. Information will be shared in consultation with the local health department and following all health privacy requirements.

If a positive case is reported to the school, principals will send an email notification to all families and staff of the affected classroom that there was a participant in the class who tested positive. If the participant(s) are determined to have been close contacts and/or significant exposure, they will be contacted separately by the school and told to quarantine for 10-14 full days from their last contact with the case. The nurse will clear those close contact participants on a case by case basis to return to school/work.

The district will utilize its [COVID-19 Metrics Dashboard](#) to provide an at-a-glance summary of information about confirmed COVID-19 cases associated with our schools. The dashboard will be updated every Friday by 5 p.m. We will report the total number of reported COVID-19 cases each week, as well as the total number of students and staff who are reported to be in quarantine as of each Friday. Positive cases do not reflect in-school transmission, unless otherwise indicated.

Communication Methods

Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, District 97 will utilize the following communication methods to keep stakeholders up to date on changes regarding all protocols:

- District 97 website: www.op97.org
- Phone and text alerts via BrightArrow
- Email communication from the district, school principals and teachers
- District social media accounts ([Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#))

References

1. "Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools." Centers for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.
2. "Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools." Illinois Department of Public Health, <http://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/community-guidance/school-guidance>.
3. "Revised Public Health Guidance for Schools, Part 5: Supporting the Full Return to In-Person Learning for All Students." Illinois State Board of Education, https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Updated-Public-Health-School-Guidance.pdf?_cldee=bEtsYWlzbmVyQHdlc3Q0MC5vcmc%3d&recipientid=contact-e7556c516df4ea11a816000d3a5913bd-7b47b84a11f84215861c3ab35293295e&esid=6d60c4fb-d0f6-eb11-94ef-0022480aa2b2.
4. "COVID-19 Updates and Resources." Illinois State Board of Education, <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/covid19.aspx>.
5. "COVID-19 Coronavirus Resources." Oak Park Department of Public Health, 2021, <https://www.oak-park.us/news/covid-19-coronavirus-resources>.