



March 29, 2021

Dear Benton and Franklin County School Administrators,

This updated Health District recommendation addresses considerations for conducting in-person learning in light of revised guidance released by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and [Washington State Department of Health](#) (DOH) in March 2021 to reflect the latest science on physical distance between students. The guidance in this letter supersedes any conflicting recommendations conveyed in prior written or verbal communications from the Health District.

In Benton and Franklin counties, K-12 schools have successfully provided in-person learning in a hybrid model without significant COVID-19 disease transmission within the classroom environment. Even when students and staff with COVID-19 have been present at school, their infections, through case investigation and contact tracing, have not shown to have been acquired because of attending school. Students and staff have had to quarantine because of close contact with a positive case, but neither secondary nor sustained transmission of COVID-19 have been seen in school environments where appropriate infection control measures have been followed.

CDC's [science brief](#) outlines the growing body of evidence on factors within the community and school setting that impact risk of transmission for COVID-19. While the focus and media attention has been on the decrease in physical distancing between students, it is important to note the additional mitigation strategies that are still necessary including **universal masking** and **adequate ventilation**. Close contact definitions will not change so this will potentially increase the number of students who may need to quarantine if a COVID-positive student or staff members brings it to the school setting. The guidance also continues to stress the impact of COVID-19 disease activity in the community on schools and requires the 6-foot distance be maintained for secondary schools located in areas with high transmission rates. .

Benton-Franklin Health District recommends that schools provide in-person learning to all students in settings where they are able to follow the required health and safety guidance outlined in:

- [K-12 Schools 2020-2021 Guidance](#) **and**
- [School Employer Health and Safety Requirements for School Scenarios](#)

Governor Inslee's [Proclamation 20-09.3 Phased Reopening of K-12 Schools](#) mandates that schools comply with these health and safety guidance.

Environmental Health & Community Health Centers

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Pasco, WA 99301
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DOH’s “K-12 Schools 2020-2021 Guidance” outlines how schools are to resume in-person instruction and must be used regardless of county or current phasing of Governor Inslee’s Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery plan.

The role of Benton and Franklin county residents remains constant in reducing community transmission by wearing face coverings, maintaining physical distancing, avoiding gatherings with people outside their household and staying home if sick or a close contact with someone with COVID-19. This information and more is available for both families and educators on our website at [covid19.bfhd.wa.gov](https://www.covid19.bfhd.wa.gov).

I look forward to continuing to work with you and your school communities to implement DOH and OSPI guidance, monitor disease activity, and respond to suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 that may occur in your schools. I also look forward to continuing our regular communication and collaboration as we navigate together through this challenging time.

Sincerely,



Amy D. Person, M.D.

Health Officer, Benton-Franklin Health District

