



## 2021-2022 St. Mary's School Opening Plan COVID GUIDANCE

\*\*Updated 2/25/22

St. Mary's School has created a framework in a way for our school to develop safe and responsive prevention practices that support in-person instruction and activities in our school in the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

**Our Catholic faith calls us to a fundamental duty of care for one another.** In addition to prayer, we are obligated to act in ways that help prevent suffering in our communities, especially among the most vulnerable. While fewer children than adults have become seriously ill with COVID-19 during the pandemic, the virus can and does spread through them. Many families have experienced hardships due to sickness, hospitalizations and deaths in our school and parish communities. **As Catholics, we must acknowledge the calling of our faith to love and protect others by making prudent and responsible choices.**

These prevention strategies have been created based on recommendations by the Minnesota Department of Health, consultation with Minnesota nonpublic school leaders, experts in Minnesota health care networks and specific needs of our parish and school communities.

**Updates** to this Guidance reflect strengthening our commitment to protect our schools and surrounding communities from unnecessary harm from COVID-19.

New information in this Guidance includes:

- Vaccination availability for ages 5-11 (page 2)
- Universal face covering option for limiting the need to quarantine close contacts (page 3)
- Visitor Policy (page 4)
- Close Contacts (page 6)
- Utilizing rapid testing options to shorten quarantine periods (page 6)
- Operational Practices (page 7)
- Resource Links (page 8)

In support of in-person instruction and activities, the Diocese of Saint Cloud supports layered mitigation strategies that support:

1. keeping COVID-19 infections out of schools
2. preventing spread within school
3. serving the needs of employees, students and families through minimizing disruptions due to exposures, infections and recovery times.

These efforts will require all members of the St. Mary's School community to share responsibility and accountability to allow for success and continued building of the Kingdom of God through our educational ministries.

\*\*Please Note: This plan will be updated as required by mandates or appropriate recommendations by church, public health or government authorities, as warranted by changing conditions with the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are 3 sections of this Plan:

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|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19 | Page 2 |
| 2. Operational Practices                                    | Page 7 |
| 3. Resources                                                | Page 8 |

**This plan includes requirements and recommendations:**

- Requirements are presented in boxes, in bold print

- Recommendations are presented with bullet points, in standard text.

## **Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of COVID-19**

### **Vaccinations**

COVID-19 vaccination provides the strongest level of mitigation against COVID-19, preventing serious harm and greatly reducing spread among individuals and communities. **Pope Francis has called vaccination against COVID-19 an “act of love” for self, family, friends and others. Persons ages 5 and up are currently eligible for vaccination.**

- **Information regarding the availability of vaccines for eligible groups will be shared with staff and parents at St. Mary's School. Our school will strive to provide support to students, families and employees who seek vaccination and may need accommodations to do so. Information about COVID-19 vaccines is provided on page 8 of this guidance.**

- Vaccinations are not required for adults and students at St. Mary's Catholic School. Parents with medical questions or concerns about vaccines are encouraged to consult with your family physician.
- Vaccinated employees and students ARE NOT required to quarantine for close contact exposures.

## Face Coverings

For the 2021-2022 school year, MDH and the CDC urge universal indoor masking for all people in PK-12 school settings, regardless of vaccination status.

- **St. Mary's School strongly recommends/urges face coverings for all students and staff at this time, regardless of vaccination status.** Please Note: This can be changed to a mandatory requirement during periods of "substantial" or "high" transmission rates of COVID-19. See the CDC tracker link in the Resources on page 8.
- **Quarantine periods are required for close contacts of infected persons, as detailed on page 5 and 6 of this Guidance.**
- St. Mary's School will implement a mask mandate if the school reaches a 5% infection rate of COVID-19 within the school. The mask mandate will go for 2 weeks increments until infection rate is down to a safer level. This guidance comes DIRECTLY from the Diocese of St. Cloud.

- **This policy will be reviewed regularly, including looking at the recommendations from MDH, CDC and in consultation with Horizon Public Health and the Diocese of St. Cloud.**
- **St. Mary's School will communicate clearly and promptly with families upon any changes to policy and practices.**

- **FACE COVERINGS are REQUIRED for all persons when riding district provided or public transportation (School Buses, Morris Transit, Coach Buses), in accordance with the federal mandates.**

- St. Mary's School face covering policy is expected to be followed at any St. Mary's School activity: field trips, After-School Program, concerts, programs, etc.

- **In close contact situations, students are not required to quarantine IF the student with the confirmed infection and the close contact were both wearing properly-fitting face coverings.**

- Face coverings may be required in situations where St. Mary's School students or staff receive services provided by staff from our partnering district.
- **Students are allowed to participate without penalty or stigma regarding the use of face coverings.**
- **St. Mary's School staff will be supportive in creating a culture of understanding and respect among themselves, students and parents.**

## Physical Distancing

Transmission of COVID-19 is significantly reduced through the use of consistent physical distancing practices.

- St. Mary's School will provide at least 3 feet of physical distance in classroom settings, and whenever feasible when students are indoors.
- St. Mary's School will continue to use assigned seating arrangements, whenever feasible, to aid any required reporting of cases to MDH or contract tracing needs.
- St. Mary's School will use cohorts or classroom-based seating for school day assemblies, activities and Masses. Guests and visitors will be limited whenever feasible.

## Visitors

- St. Mary's School will limit visitors, guests and vendors to those who are a part of essential activities.
  - **All persons who enter the school building must comply with health and safety procedures, including a self-screening for symptoms of illness and exposure to COVID-19.** It is recommended that ALL visitors wear face coverings.
  - **Self-screening information and instructions are posted at all entrances used by St. Mary's school for visitors.**
- St. Mary's encourages all visitors to arrange an appointment ahead of time, whenever possible.

## Ventilation

- **St. Mary's School has worked to ensure that all ventilation systems are operational and support exchanging air in indoor spaces.** Some classrooms also have air purifier units.

## Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

- **St. Mary's School will teach and promote routines for proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes).**

## **Staying Home when Sick and Getting Tested/Positive Cases**

With the prioritized mitigation strategy of keeping COVID-19 out of schools, it is essential that employees and families are informed about the signs and symptoms of infectious diseases, so they can be proactive in protecting themselves and the community. A public health fact sheet of information, with common symptoms of the COVID-19 disease can be found in the Resources on page 8 & 9.

- Catholic schools may utilize a reduced 5-day isolation period for COVID-19 infection in students or employees, starting with the day following the positive test:
  - If no symptoms, the student or employee may return to school on day 6, and must wear a properly fitting, medical grade mask until day 10
  - If symptomatic, the student or employee may return no sooner than day 6 if symptoms have improved, AND there has been no fever for at least 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication, and must wear a properly fitting, medical grade mask until day 10
  - For severe infections, students or employees must isolate for at least 10 days, or until symptoms improve and there has been no fever for at least 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication
- For further guidance, see:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html> St. Mary's School will provide self-screening information and instructions to employees and families that includes the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. St. Mary's School strongly recommends that any one experiencing such signs and symptoms be tested.
- Employees or students experiencing signs and symptoms of COVID-19 may not come to school. It is recommended that they be tested for COVID-19. They may return to school when symptom-free, and without using medication to reduce symptoms for a minimum of 24 hours.
- Employees or students who test negative for COVID-19 may return to school when symptom-free, and without using medication to reduce symptoms for a minimum of 24 hours.

## Sending Sick People Home

- If a St. Mary's student or employee becomes ill with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they must immediately be sent home, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status or prior history of illness. While waiting, students will be separated from others and provided a face covering, if not wearing one already.

## Reporting Cases, Close Contacts and Quarantines

- In the event that an employee or student has a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19, St. Mary's School must [complete a report to MDH](#), in accordance with [Minnesota Rule 4605.7070](#). The report link is included in the Resources on page 7 as well.
  - To identify potential exposures, the St. Mary's School must gather and review the employee or student's activities during the time they were infectious, two days prior to the date symptoms started, or two days prior to the positive test if no symptoms. Close contacts include those who were within 6 feet of the infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
    - In classroom settings, close contacts DO NOT include students who were properly wearing well-fitting masks. **\*\*This ONLY applies to students where both the infected and close contact were BOTH properly wearing masks.**
    - Household members (siblings, e.g.) attending the school are considered close contacts of the infected person.
  - St. Mary's School will notify any visitors who are identified as close contacts as soon as possible. They will be encouraged to watch for symptoms of COVID-19.
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- Catholic schools may discontinue the use of required quarantines for close contacts of employees or students, but must be vigilant with the following:
    - Employees or students who show or develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while at school must be sent home, and encouraged to pursue either lab-confirmed or rapid testing for the virus
    - Employees or students with illness (not COVID-19) must stay home until symptoms have improved, AND there has been no fever for at least 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication
    - Close contacts of household members are strongly encouraged to test for COVID-19, using either lab-confirmed or rapid testing methods
    - Students or employees with confirmed COVID-19 infections must stay home, following a minimum practice of the 5-day isolation period as detailed above
    - For further guidance, see:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>
  - ○ Because Preschool is licensed through the Department of Human Services, we do have to follow their rules. There may be quarantine required for preschool students who may be considered close contacts.
  - St. Mary's School does have at-home COVID-19 test kits available for families that may need them.

- Fully vaccinated persons and those who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days, including household members also in the school, are not required to quarantine, unless they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19. **St. Mary's school is required to verify vaccination status for students or employees in order for them to not be required to quarantine.**
  - This may be accomplished by presentation of a vaccination card to the school. St. Mary's School will not be required to file copies of vaccination cards and will practice confidentiality and discretion with this information.
  - **The vaccinated person must have reached fully vaccinated status at least 14 days prior to exposure.**

## Cleaning and Disinfection

The COVID-19 virus is primarily spread through airborne droplets, but may also be spread through physical contact with surfaces contaminated with the virus.

- St. Mary's School will continue with established disinfecting and cleaning practices of high-traffic, high contact areas at regular intervals throughout each school day. For other areas, a daily cleaning and disinfection is sufficient and will be completed.

## Operational Practices

Most day-to-day activities will resume operational practices consistent with pre-pandemic ones.

- At St. Mary's School, in-person learning will be the standard and focus of educational efforts, with accommodations made for individuals due to reasonable needs, according to school policies. Schools are not expected to provide extensive alternative learning models.
- Lunch service may be resumed in cafeterias or typical designated spaces. Cleaning and disinfection of high contact surfaces should be practiced between groups, whenever possible.
- While the use of cohorts remains a recommended practice, students may again attend special area classes (e.g. phyed, art, music, science) in those designated spaces. Any appropriate additional cleaning or disinfection of high contact surfaces will be practiced.
- Celebration of school day masses, prayer services or other assemblies will resume as before, however, the use of cohorts will be used when necessary. Parishioners or guests who attend such events will continue to be seated separately, whenever possible. St. Mary's School will strive to find a balance of including family members in these events, while maintaining practices that allow for safety and follow-through of protocols.
- Services provided through Morris Area Public Schools may require protocols that are different than those at St. Mary's School.
- St. Mary's School is not required to provide remote working arrangements for employees, but are encouraged to support people with reasonable accommodations and needs, whenever possible.

- **Extracurricular activities should be undertaken with precautions consistent with those in place during the school day.**

## Resources

### Vaccine Information

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

The Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20201221\\_nota-vaccini-anticovid\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html)

Vaccines and ethical considerations in light of COVID-19 (Central Minnesota Catholic, Dec 2020)

<https://thecentralminnesotacatholic.org/ask-father-tom-vaccines-and-ethical-considerations-in-light-of-covid-19/>

UPDATED: Pope Francis' remarks on COVID-19 on August 18, 2021

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-appeal-covid-19-vaccines-act-of-love.html>

### Tracking COVID-19 transmission rates

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

### Reporting and Handling COVID-19 Cases

UPDATED: COVID-19 case reporting form

<https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=YLH94XW7YKD9WDE9>

MDH Recommendations for Handling a confirmed case of COVID-19

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/casehandle.pdf>

COVID-19 fact sheet for school use

<https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/residents/health-medical/infectious-diseases-fact-sheets/covid-19-provider-technical-fact-sheet.pdf>

## **COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Settings**

Printable signs and posters

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html#posters>

Minnesota Department of Health

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/schoolrecs.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k12-guidance.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

## **Diocese of Saint Cloud Coronavirus Updates**

<https://stcdio.org/coronavirus-update/>