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DHS Releases School Guidance to Assist Local and Tribal Health Departments

The upcoming start of the 2020-2021 school year during the COVID-19 pandemic brings a unique set of challenges to Wisconsin school districts and local and tribal health departments. Ensuring the safety of Wisconsin students is key to furthering their education, which is why today DHS is building on Education Forward and Reopening School Buildings Risk Assessment Tool documents that were released in June by releasing Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in Wisconsin.

"I always say what's best for our kids is what's best for our state, and nothing is more important than the education and future of our kids," said Governor Tony Evers. "Education, health, and safety all go hand-in-hand, and that is why this pandemic has made school this fall such a complicated issue. Whether it's in-person instruction or virtual learning, we know it's going to be a difficult start to the school year, and we're going to have to keep working together to figure out how to best serve our kids."

School district leaders across the state have been consulting with their local and tribal health departments and making difficult decisions as they balance virus mitigation measures with the need for quality instruction, access to technology and the internet, and the challenge of connecting students and families with needed resources like food, special education services, and mental health services. The newly released guidelines focus on containing the virus by providing a resource for local and tribal health departments as they investigate and control cases and outbreaks in schools within their jurisdictions.

"We know that this virus is highly transmissible, and that we have high levels of COVID-19 activity across the state," said DHS Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. "We developed this guidance because we want local and tribal health departments to be prepared so that, when outbreaks occur, they can act quickly to address cases and prevent further spread."

The guidelines released today outline preventive measures, including information on best practices for wearing face coverings and cohorting students, and detail how to effectively detect and respond to cases and outbreaks in a school. Key guidelines include instructions for school staff in identifying cases and close

contacts among students, considerations when it comes to contact tracing, and isolation and quarantine practices for infected or exposed students and staff.

In addition to this written guidance, DHS Public Health experts will work alongside local health departments to provide technical assistance to school districts, and DHS will continue to extend resources and assistance when an outbreak is identified.

“It is not possible to eliminate the risk of disease transmission, but schools can implement infection control measures to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission in schools,” said Wisconsin’s Interim State Health Officer Stephanie Smiley. “Taking steps to minimize interactions closer than six feet and using face coverings to block respiratory droplets have been shown to be effective measures in preventing transmission in countries where in-person learning has been reinstated. When it comes to these recommendations, we are following the science, and we will continue to make sure our local and tribal health departments have the information they need to work effectively with school districts when outbreaks occur.”

For up-to-date information about Wisconsin’s COVID-19 response, visit the DHS [COVID-19 webpage](#). We also encourage you to follow @DHSWI on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), or dhs.wi on [Instagram](#) for more information on COVID-19.