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COVID-19 Guidance for Schools Recommends Layered Approach to Return to In-Person Learning

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) released updated COVID-19 Guidance for Schools that includes four core essential strategies and additional mitigation practices to facilitate the return to in-person learning in the 2021-2022 school year.

“This update comes at a time when we are emphasizing the return to in-person learning for K-12 schools,” said Acting State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble. “As the science related to COVID-19 mitigation practices has grown, we have more tools to ensure schools are as safe for our students as possible. Implementing multiple mitigation strategies consistently and in combination gives schools the flexibility to achieve safe learning environments.”

In-person learning requires implementation of core essential strategies, which include:

- Promoting COVID-19 vaccination among all staff and eligible students 12 years of age and older
- Directing staff and students to stay home when sick
- Correct and consistent masking indoors
- Hand hygiene

Mitigation practices, such as designated cohorts, improving ventilation, physical distancing, screening testing, and cleaning and disinfection should be applied in combination to the greatest extent possible to maintain safe school operations. Consistent use of multiple mitigation strategies as described in this document can slow the spread of COVID-19 and maintain safe operations in schools.

Achieving full COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students as well as teachers, staff, and household members is one of the most critical strategies to help schools safely resume full in-person operations.

Updates to guidance also include adding COVID-19 screening testing in schools, clarifying the definition of a student close contact in a K-12 indoor classroom setting, and lifting the requirement for a negative COVID-19 test or a clinician's note to return to school after completing isolation and quarantine. The guidance also includes risk-based considerations for school-based activities such as sports and extracurricular activities, after school programs, and field trips.

The guidance is adapted from the CDC's Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools and is subject to change as new information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic becomes available. It was developed by DOH in collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatrics, Hawai'i Chapter; Hawai'i Department of Education; Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools; Hawai'i Catholic Schools; Hawai'i Keiki Nurses; Hawai'i State Public Charter Schools Commission; and the Kaua'i District Health Office.

[Click here to download the updated guidance.](#)

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