

Guidelines from The Task Force on Family Ministry, Children's Ministry, and Schools

As of November 02, 2021

Introduction from the Bishops:

Greetings to the vestries, school leaders, and parents of our weekday and Sunday schools.

As your bishops, we continue to be profoundly grateful to the members of the Task Force on Schools and Children's Ministries who have continued their work throughout the pandemic. Looking to the CDC, as well as other institutions (such as the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia) who are dedicated to the safety and well-being of children in a learning environment, the task force has kept our protocols up to date with best practices and guidelines for keeping our children, students, faculty, staff and volunteers safe during the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

As a result, our schools have been equipped to make their best decisions about if, when, where and how to reopen. Thanks be to God.

The Task Force continues to consult with educators, parents, school officials, and public health experts, all connected with Episcopal churches to provide updated guidelines and recommendations. We endorse them wholeheartedly. Our highest value is to protect the wellbeing of our children, students, faculty and families.

There is still no approved vaccination for children under 12 years of age, and many individuals remain unvaccinated. *These updated protocols and recommendations, therefore, are still extremely important to protect children and their families.* (Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination among eligible individuals can help Early Care and Education (ECE) programs protect staff and children in their care, as well as their families.)

There is no one size fits all when it comes to local church discernment about protecting the safety and wellbeing of our weekday schools and attendees of church events especially for children (i.e. Godly Play, Sunday school classes, EYC). We know that a child's well being includes the learning and social development in a loving environment with well-equipped and supported teachers and staff.

While setting some essential parameters, these guidelines and recommendations give you and your local community room to make some of your own determinations for your own location. If you wish to offer an alternative or customized plan that appears to differ in some significant way from these recommendations, we are more than happy to consult with you. In such a case, please direct your communications to our co-chairs the Rev. Lauren Villemuer-Drenth and Caroline Stephenson. They and the other members of the team will be more than happy to work with you and help navigate a mutually acceptable plan. Bishop Hodges-Copple continues as bishop liaison for this task force.

Thanks be to God for the time and talent, love and wisdom, expertise and research that has been offered by the Task Force for Schools and Children's Ministries. God bless each of our school communities with continued wisdom and grace to continue to navigate the journey ahead. This document will continue to be re-evaluated and updated approximately every 30 days.

Each item below is organized under the "RRD" format, with guidelines for protocols that are **Required**, **Recommended**, or commended to you for **Discernment** based on your circumstances.

NEW GUIDANCE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMING

All early childhood programs, morning out programs, and preschools operating on church campuses within the Episcopal Diocese of NC, are expected to adhere to the guidelines set forth in [The ChildCareStrong NC Public Health ToolKit](#) published by the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). This Toolkit is aligned with the [COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#) published by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

The following represents **HIGHLIGHTS** from this ToolKit, as well as some suggestions from the Task Force. **New information is highlighted in yellow.**

Required: These are items included in the NC DHHS Toolkit.

Recommended: These are items that are not required, but that we feel are the best practices in order to keep all God’s people safe and healthy.

For Discernment: These are items we feel should be considered by local leadership, taking into account the local context. The Diocese will support you in your discernment.

Facilities and Personnel

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
Allow 36- 42 sq ft of space for each individual in a classroom. This is the same as before the pandemic.	Limit indoor interaction between classrooms. Maintain classroom cohorts. Schools should require all teachers and staff to be vaccinated or submit a weekly negative COVID test. A PCR Covid Test is the standard. Weekly testing on Wed/Thurs is ideal. At home testing will not be accepted for monitoring and surveillance of teachers and staff who are unvaccinated.	Schools may choose to limit guest presenters, visitors, and volunteers. Schools may choose to continue to limit parent access to classrooms.

Cloth Face Coverings (CFC)

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
-----------------	--------------------	------------------------

Children 2 years and older and all adults (regardless of vaccination status) are to wear a CFC <i>indoors</i> .	Masks should be worn during crowded <i>outdoor</i> settings or during outdoor activities that involve sustained close contact.	Consider allowing children to play outdoors, unmasked while encouraging social distancing when feasible. Consider masks with clear panels or face shields for teachers during small group and circle time/activities.
--	--	--

Daily Arrival and Departure Procedures/Daily Health Screenings

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
Schools must continue to require parents/care-givers and staff to do a COVID-19 home screening before attending school each morning. A Google form or survey may be useful. An updated symptom check-list should be made available.	Drop-off/pick-up times may be staggered to ensure physical distancing is possible. Community Covenants should include a daily home screening for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.	Schools may wish to continue to use a staff person to conduct health screenings of each child before they enter the building.

Preventing Spread in the Classroom

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
Children who show symptoms of COVID-19 during the school day should be isolated in a designated area with one staff member supervising; a parent/guardian must pick up the child ASAP. Check ventilation systems to ensure that air conditioning systems work, with clean filters. Schools should follow CDC and State Sanitation Guidelines All toys, surfaces, door handles, etc. must be frequently sanitized.	Use floor markers and other methods to encourage physical distancing in the classroom and shared spaces. Limit the use of materials shared between children. Singing activities: When outdoors, maintain 6 ft of distance between children. For indoor singing, maintain a distance of 10 ft. Children should remain masked. Install a 4-inch to 6-inch thick HEPA filter with a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) rating of 11 to 13, as	Schools may choose to remove toys and other items that are difficult to sanitize on a regular basis. Sensory toys are allowable, schools should consider how these are used, how often they are cleaned or switched out, and if there are any outbreaks in your community. Open windows/doors if possible and when not dangerous for children.

Food servers must wear a CFC and gloves.	sufficient to improve air quality without impeding airflow through a non-HEPA system.	
--	---	--

**Safety Guidelines for church programming
for children birth- 5th grade, including nursery services**

Please refer to the [Youth Ministry Regathering Guidelines](#) for guidance and specifics for those who are in grades 6-12.

Safe Church reminders:

[Best Practices for Safe Church](#) requires these minimum ratios of children to adults:

1 adult per 6 children age 5 and younger, with 2 adults minimum

1 adult per 8 children age 6 years and older, with 2 adults for minimum.

(We highly recommend that you have additional adults, especially with the youngest children, to assist them with distancing. We suggest having an additional adult with twos and threes, making the ratio 1 adult per 2 children aged 2 and 3, with a minimum of 2 adults in any situation.)

When possible, offer concurrent virtual programming. Use every opportunity to meet outdoors.

Facilities and Personnel

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
Staff and volunteers should be vaccinated. Allow 36- 42 sq ft of space for each individual in a classroom/nursery/meeting space. (This is the same as before the pandemic).	Utilize outdoor spaces as much as possible. Churches may choose to require vaccination proof or ask employees to undergo weekly COVID testing.	Congregations may choose to continue to limit parent access to classrooms/nurseries.

Cloth Face Coverings (CFC)

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
Children 2 years and older and all adults (regardless of vaccination status) are to wear a CFC indoors.	It is highly recommended that children wear masks when outdoors for programming and/or for play.	Congregations may consider allowing children to play outdoors, unmasked, when physical distancing is maintained.

Daily Arrival and Departure Procedures/Daily Health Screenings

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
Participants, staff, and all volunteers should monitor themselves and not participate if they have any signs and/or symptoms of Covid-19.		Congregations may wish to continue to use a staff person/volunteer to conduct health screenings of each child before they enter the building.

Preventing Spread in Meeting Spaces

Required	Recommended	For Discernment
<p>Children who show symptoms of COVID-19 while at church should be isolated in a designated area with one adult, (in the line of sight of a second adult); a parent/guardian must pick up the child ASAP.</p> <p>Check ventilation systems to ensure that air conditioning systems work, with clean filters.</p> <p>All toys, surfaces, door handles, etc. must be frequently sanitized.</p> <p>Hand sanitizer should be available at entrances and exits and frequently utilized by children and adults.</p> <p>Food servers must be fully vaccinated individuals. They must wear a CFC and gloves. Distancing must be maintained during consumption.</p> <p>Have a plan for isolating and caring for a child who becomes sick while on campus. Sample plans may be found here.</p> <p>A listing of participants should be kept to facilitate contact tracing if it becomes necessary.</p>	<p>Use floor markers and other methods to encourage physical distancing in the classroom and shared spaces.</p> <p>Limit the use of materials shared between children.</p> <p>Singing activities: When outdoors, maintain 6 ft of distance between children. For indoor singing, maintain a distance of 10 ft. Children should remain masked. Refer to the Diocese of NC Guidelines for Corporate Singing for details on guidelines for choral groups (i.e. prolonged vocal rehearsals or group singing situations.)</p> <p>Install a 4-inch to 6-inch thick HEPA filter with a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) rating of 11 to 13, as sufficient to improve air quality without impeding airflow through a non-HEPA system.</p>	<p>Remove toys and other items that are difficult to sanitize on a regular basis.</p> <p>Open windows/doors if possible and when not dangerous for children.</p> <p>It is left up to local discernment if pre-registration for events, programs, and nursery will be required.</p>