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IDPH AND ISBE ISSUE NEW PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE SUPPORTING A RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

On March 9, 2021, the Illinois Department of Public Health (“IDPH”) and the Illinois State Board of Education (“ISBE”) issued [Revised Public Health Guidance for Schools](#). Through this guidance, IDPH and ISBE recommend and support a return to in-person instruction throughout Illinois as soon as practicable. To make this goal possible, the guidance lists certain practices which schools must follow to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 as schools open and return to in-person instruction. Specifically, schools must:

1. Require universal and correct use of appropriate personal protective equipment, including face masks;

2. Require social distancing be observed;
3. Require contact tracing, isolation of individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, and quarantine of close contacts;
4. Require an increase in schoolwide cleaning and disinfection; and
5. Require promotion and adherence to handwashing and respiratory etiquette.

The guidance also contains new information and recommendations for how schools can comply with the above-practices and return to in-person instruction in a safe manner. Some of the key information found in the guidance includes:

- All people on school grounds and school buses are required to wear face masks. The guidance lists a limited number of exceptions to this rule including, for example, when students are eating, or when an individual has a documented medical condition which prevents him from wearing a mask.

- For in-person learning, social distancing is now defined as 3-6 feet for students and fully vaccinated staff. Although 6 feet is safest, schools can operate with a 3-foot social distancing to provide in-person learning.
 - Any time face masks are removed (e.g., during lunch), schools must strictly adhere to 6-feet social distancing.
 - Unvaccinated staff should still maintain 6-feet distance as much as possible.
- Close contacts (exposure to a confirmed case within 6 feet of the confirmed case for a cumulative period of 15 minutes over 24 hours) are still required to quarantine. However, a person who is fully vaccinated is not considered a close contact and is therefore not required to quarantine.
- To minimize exposure to other individuals, schools should utilize cohorts in which students – and sometimes teachers or staff – stay together throughout the school day. Young children should stay in cohorts all day, and schools should utilize cohorts as much as possible for older children.
- Schools should continue to perform contact tracing in

collaboration with local health departments.

- Schools should require self-certification by all staff, students, and visitors prior to entering school buildings.
 - IDPH and the CDC no longer recommend, however, that schools perform symptom screenings (e.g., temperature checks) for all individuals. However, schools may continue to perform screenings themselves if they choose to do so.
- Schools should develop and implement sanitation procedures in accordance with CDC, IDPH, and local health department recommendations.
- During meals, students should sit at assigned seats and with the same group each day. If possible, all students should face the same direction during meals.
- Meals should be individually plated, and all food and drink items should be served to students rather than having students help themselves.
- Physical education activities must allow for 6 feet of distance between students as much as possible. Face masks are required to be worn at all times.
- Schools must educate students and staff on healthy hand



and respiratory hygiene practices.

Finally, while the guidance strongly encourages all Illinois schools to return to in-person instruction, it clarifies that students who are at increased risk of severe illness as a result of COVID-19, or who live with people at an increased risk, must still be given the option of remote instruction.

If you have any questions, please contact one of our attorneys.

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