

System/Service Area: Health Services Department		Subject: COVID-19 Mitigation Policy	
Related Regulation(s): 1302.47; 1302.47 (9); 1302.93 and 1302.94			
Related Forms: Hidalgo County COVID-19 ISD Reporting Form		Related Reports:	
PC Approval:		Board Approval:	
PC Revision:		Board Revision:	

POLICY: Hidalgo County Head Start Program (HCHSP) will maintain an evidence-based COVID-19 Mitigation plan to mitigate the potential transmission on COVID-19 in our schools and workplace. The policy will keep our schools safe, will protect children, families and staff from infection or illness. HCHSP used the guidance listed in the reference section of this policy. The policy will be **scaled up or down as needed** as a result of the impact of COVID-19 in the community.

Individuals ages two (2) and older are not required to wear a mask unless there are exemptions listed in the Contact Tracing, Quarantine, and Return to School/Work Protocol of this policy. It is optional for all students and staff regardless of level of transmission, however wearing a mask is highly encouraged to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and its variants.

Time Frame: Daily

Person(s)

Responsible: All Head Start Staff
 All Head Start Children and Families
 All Non-Head Start Visitors, Contractors, Vendors

PROCEDURE: COVID-19 Community Levels

Layered prevention strategies are in place based on the level of disease burden in their community, classified as low, medium, or high. This will serve an operational and level indicator which consists of five (5) levels. Staff refer to HCHSP Work Safe Plan.

- 1) Emergency response operations
- 2) Escalated operations
- 3) Increased readiness operations
- 4) Enhanced operations
- 5) Routine operations

Layered Mitigation Strategies - Areas of Focus:

- Low Transmission
 - Stay up to date with vaccines.
 - Get tested if you have symptoms
- Medium Transmission
 - If you are at high risk for severe illness, talk to your health care provider.
 - Stay up to date with vaccines.
 - Get tested if you have symptoms.
- High Transmission
 - Wear a mask indoors when in public.

- Stay up to date with vaccines.
- Get tested if you have symptoms.

Prevention Strategies:

All staff, children, families, visitors, contractors and vendors will self-screen by utilizing the program's self-monitoring COVID-19 Poster, before entering any HCHSP building. For Head Start staff, children, families and visitors entering partnering Independent School Districts (ISD) schools, they will be required to use the ISD's policies regarding COVID-19 Mitigation Prevention Strategies. If children or staff are symptomatic and test positive for COVID-19 by home test or laboratory test, then the children's parents and staff must follow the corresponding guidance for isolation and contact Human Resources. Parents or guardians must notify the school, contact their health care provider and follow the corresponding guidance for isolation.

Layered Mitigation Techniques:

1. Promote vaccination,
2. Staying home when sick and getting tested,
3. Ventilation,
4. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette,
5. Cleaning and disinfecting, in accordance with CDC guidelines and HCHSP Work Safe Plan.

Staying Home When Sick (Staff and Children):

Children and staff must stay home with signs of any illness, such as cough, fever, loss of taste and smell, cold/flu symptoms. Contact their healthcare provider if symptoms do not resolve after 48hrs. A person may be asked to provide a doctor's note to return to school.

Hygiene: Hand washing/ Hand Sanitizer and Respiratory Etiquette:

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette are strongly encouraged for all staff, parents, children and visitors. Wash hands with soap and water for more than 20 seconds and dry them by means of air or paper towel. All HCHSP and ISD schools are equipped with hand soap dispensers to encourage and promote handwashing. Hand sanitizers are also provided to increase hand sanitizing opportunities. If soap and water are inaccessible, alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used. While sneezing or coughing, cover mouth with a tissue or elbow. Wash hands whenever mouth or nose is touched.

Cleaning and Disinfection:

Cleaning and disinfecting must be done to maintain a safe and healthy learning and working environment for children and staff. Custodians must follow "*Process Cleaning for Health*", to include prioritizing emptying trash, cleaning high touch surfaces, sanitizing restrooms, and vacuuming. Disinfecting wipes must be available to support any additional cleaning throughout the day.

Ventilation:

Increasing ventilation (outdoor air) and filtration: To improve air quality and decrease risk of infection, schools will increase ventilation by opening or slightly cracking windows open when it does not create a safety or health hazard for children. This includes classroom windows, school buses or other transportation to help improve airflow. Using child-safe fans in accordance with CDC guidance, can also help increase the impact of open windows and doors.

Social Distancing (indoors):

Strongly recommended to maintain 2 arm's length or 6 feet apart. When social distance cannot be maintained inside the school, it is highly recommended to wear masks.

Meal Time:

If possible, children should be spaced further apart from each other at tables. Staff will still model positive eating habits.

Facemasks (Indoors):

Wearing a mask is highly encouraged as an important mitigation strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and its variants. It is optional for all students and staff regardless of level of transmission. When worn, a face mask or covering should fit snugly and must completely cover the mouth and nose of the person.

Personal Items and Attire:

Label all water bottles and other personal items. Children should wear appropriate clothing and not share clothing. Frequent hand washing is highly encouraged.

COVID-19 Vaccination:

COVID-19 vaccinations are not required; however, the program and CDC strongly encourage that all staff, children, families and volunteers be up-to-date on their COVID-19 vaccinations due to the proven benefits for individual and local community safety, including reduced incidences of severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Strategies to Increase COVID-19 Vaccine Awareness:

- Contact your primary healthcare provider, pharmacist, or community health center, or visit their website.
- Contact your local health department.
- Check your local pharmacy's website to see if vaccination appointments are available. Some pharmacies offer vaccines with or without an appointment.

Contact Tracing, Quarantine, and Return to School/Work Protocol:

HCHSP will report all cases of COVID-19 of children and staff to the Hidalgo County Health Department. HCHSP will work closely with the Hidalgo County Health Department when a child or staff tests positive for COVID-19 and is required to isolate. While the latest state guidance makes the mask requirement optional, the following health and safety protocols remain in place:

- Regardless of vaccination status, if a child tests positive for COVID-19, they must isolate for five (5) full days. Children may return to school after day five (5) if they are asymptomatic or if symptoms are resolving. For days 6-10 following a positive test, children are **required** to wear a mask in school, including on the school bus.
- If a child has been exposed to COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, it is **highly recommended** that they wear a mask for a full ten (10) days following that exposure.

- State and local health officials continue to recommend testing for COVID-19 following possible exposure. If you need a test, please get in touch with the HCHSP Human Resources Department or your physician or clinic of choice.
- Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 should stay home from school, regardless of vaccination status or recent infection, until tested and/or isolate for five (5) days. If a child/staff has symptoms and is unsure what to do, please get in touch with Campus Director or the HCHSP Human Resources Department.

Visitors to Centers/Administrative Office During the School Day:

Visitors to any HCHSP facility will be required to sign-in and self-screen by utilizing the HCHSP self-monitoring COVID-19 Poster. Visitors will be admitted by appointment **only**, when COVID-19 Community Levels are assigned as follows: 1. "Emergency response operations" or 2. "Escalated operations". EX. meeting with - teacher, campus director, and administrative office staff, outside providers/vendors, facilities repair. Appointments will **not be necessary** when community levels are at 3. "Increased readiness operations", 4. "Enhanced operations", or 5. "Routine operations".

These are guidelines, and each Positive COVID-19 case needs to be evaluated individually.

REFERENCES

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<https://www.hidalgocounty.us/coronavirusupdates>

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<https://www.texashealth.org/About-Texas-Health/Here-for-You-and-Your-Safety/COVID-19-Testing>

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(2022, October 5). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-childcare-guidance.html>

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Office of Head Start (OHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) final rule effective date 01/06/2023.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/01/06/2022-28451/mitigating-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-head-start-programs>