
A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools

FAQ 1: Physical Distancing

Rev. Sept 9, 2020

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has released joint guidance with the Vermont Department of Health on safely reopening schools. This document, [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#), provides health guidance to school administrators and school personnel as they plan and implement the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 School Year in the context of COVID-19.

This Frequently Asked Questions document responds to follow up questions from educators and administrators and is intended to clarify and expand on the guidance.

Q1: The guidance states that the six-foot number for separating student workspaces is a recommendation not a requirement. I know that there are many educational leaders who are taking the spacing measure as a requirement and are feeling like they cannot comply with that “expectation.” Could you clarify the intent of the measures?

The best way to prevent the spread of coronavirus is wear a facial covering when unable to stay 6 feet apart. The guidance reflects that reality and reopening schools need to adhere to both strategies as much as possible.

The best practice is to maintain six feet of distance between students (three-to-six feet of distance for students PreK-Grade 5) to minimize the risk of spreading the virus. At the same time, we recognize this may not be possible in all settings. Therefore, it is a strong recommendation but not required. Schools should set up classrooms as best they can.

Q2: Could best practices include spacing student workstations closer than 6 feet apart when aligned in the same direction? If plastic barriers are installed between student work stations, how might that measure help reduce the spacing?

Maintaining a six-foot distance (three-to-six-foot for PreK-Grade 5 students) is preferable but may not always be possible. If installed properly, plastic barriers between students would eliminate the need for the six-foot distancing. Turning workstations to face in the same direction is a best practice detailed in the [Strong and Healthy Start Guidance](#).

Q3: Is there a way to balance the risk of physical distancing and facial coverings depending on the settings?

We suggest that school leaders review the guidance and note when words like “possible” or “feasible” are included so you can see where the opportunities for “doing the best you can” come in.

NEW Q4: Do kids PreK-Grade 5 who are outside need to be masked if they are between 3 and 6 feet apart? Is it ok for them to not wear masks at a 3-foot distance?

Students of all ages need to wear masks if they can’t maintain a 6-foot distance, including students in PreK-Grade 5 and including when students are outside. The 3-to-6-foot distancing for the younger grades is only allowable if the students are wearing masks.
