



**TO: Pastors, Parish Catechetical Leaders and Youth Ministry Leaders**  
**FROM: Office for Evangelization and Family Life & Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry**  
**DATE: August 20, 2021**  
**RE: COVID Update**

---

As we begin this 2021-2022 school year, the health of our children and youth remains of the utmost importance. We are striving to follow the guidelines put forth by the CDC and the Alabama Department of Public Health so that our children and youth remain safe and able to attend school. Because Religious Education and Youth Ministry programs put our children and youth in conditions that are different from attending Sunday Mass with their family, these programs need to follow more stringent guidelines. We will monitor the COVID situation in all areas of the Archdiocese and will adjust these guidelines as needed.

All volunteers as well as participants in our programs must sign the COVID waiver prior to participating in our programs. The signed copy should be kept on file at the parish. Copies of these waivers are attached.

Protocols for the start of the 2021-22 school year should include:

- Temperature checks upon arrival for children/youth and staff
- Reminders of the need for frequent handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Availability of hand sanitizer throughout the facility
- Cleaning and disinfecting after each group uses the facility
- Cleaning and disinfecting the facility as soon as possible if the program has a sick person or someone who tests positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours
- Ensuring better ventilation by keeping windows and doors open when feasible

Parent encouragements:

- Consider vaccination if your child is eligible
- Keep child/youth home if he/she is symptomatic
- Notify parish program leaders if child/youth tests positive for COVID and may have been positive at the time of attending the program

Operational details:

- Masks
  - In keeping with the Archdiocesan policy for Catholic schools, all students, staff and visitors are required to wear masks while participating in RE and YM events when indoors.
  - Students, staff and visitors are not required to wear masks outdoors. Leaders are encouraged to have the children/youth outside whenever feasible.
- Physical distancing
  - In classrooms, assemblies and at Mass, maintain physical distance of 3 feet between children and youth from unrelated households when feasible
  - As much as possible maintain cohorts (pods) and seating charts
  - In common areas (areas outside of cohorts), maintain physical distance of 6 feet between children/youth when feasible
  - A distance of at least 6 feet is recommended between children/youth and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated
  - Minimal movement of groups from one area to another is recommended

- Documentation
  - In the event of a report of a COVID positive person at a class/event, contact tracing will be done, regardless of grade level
    - Keep confidential the identity of the COVID positive person
    - Contact those who have been identified as “close contacts” and provide them with information concerning quarantine.
    - Contact the others from the event to let them know of the COVID positive instance but that they were not identified as being a “close contact”.
  - As stated in the Archdiocesan policy dated July 23, schools would not require proof of vaccination. In the same manner, the only time the question of vaccination should come up in parishes is to determine if a close contact has to quarantine. Staff and parents of youth over 12 can verbally confirm this to you.
  - If you have questions regarding documentation, please contact Janet Masline (RE programs) or Tex Phelps (YM programs).
  
- Determining close contact
  - A close contact is an individual who has been within 6 feet of a COVID positive person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
  - **Student exception:** *“In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student ..... where both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks; and other K–12 school prevention strategies (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the K–12 school setting.”*
  - Fully vaccinated staff/students **do not** have to quarantine unless manifesting COVID symptoms.
  
- Meals/Snacks
  - Because our children/youth will be unmasked while eating, serve food in a manner that best allows for physical distancing and contact tracing. When feasible, consider eating outdoors.
  
- Transporting children/youth to offsite events
  - Per the CDC guidance, **masks must be worn by all** when being transported by the parish to any offsite event.
  - Weigh the ministerial value of the event vs. risk of infection and the difficulty of allowing areas for 3 feet physical distancing for non-vaccinated children/youth.
  
- Overnight Retreats/Events
  - When scheduling an overnight trip, retreat or event, continually monitor the transmission rates in both the area of the parish and the area of the housing (if the locations are not in the same area). Changes may need to be made in regards to the physical distancing plans.
  - Housing should be kept at half capacity while maintaining physical distance of 6 feet between sleeping areas to accommodate masks not being worn while sleeping.
  - Use of facilities should be emphasized to avoid sharing items and maintain physical distancing.
  
- Trips and Large Events
  - Please be mindful of any trips or large events to insure safety protocols are in place.
  - When reserving housing, transportation or any outside service, be aware of the cancellation policy in case the event has to be cancelled on short notice.
  - If possible, utilize locations where parents can drop off children to avoid crowded transportation with people from different households.

If you have any questions concerning these guidelines, please call the Office for Evangelization and Family Life (251-433-6991) or the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry (251-433-4138).

ADPH Back to School Guidance

<https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/assets/cov-school-guidance-073021.pdf>

CDC guidance for schools

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

Additional CDC mask guidance

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/outdoor-activities.html#print>

American Pediatric Association statement

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>