

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

FAQ 1: Physical Distancing

Rev. Oct. 29, 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. Could you clarify the intent of this measure?

Classrooms and other school spaces should be set up to ensure a minimum distance between students. For students in grades PreK-6, the minimum distance is three feet. For students in grades 7-12, the minimum distance is six feet.

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?

Aligning workstations in the same direction or installing barriers does not alleviate the requirement to ensure minimum distances are maintained. Turning workstations to face in the same direction is a best practice detailed in the [Strong and Healthy Start Guidance](#), but is not a substitute for maintaining minimum distances.

Q3: Do kids PreK-Grade 6 who are outside need to be masked?

Yes. Students of all ages need to wear masks if they can't maintain a 6-foot distance, including students in PreK-Grade 6 and including when they are outside.

Students and staff may remove their masks ("take a mask break") if they are outside and can ensure that they will be more than six feet apart for the entire time they have their masks off.

Q4: Does the transition from Step II to Step III affect the requirement for physical distancing?

No. The transition from Step II to Step III does not affect the physical distancing requirements. The minimum distancing requirements are applicable to both Step II and Step III.

Q5: How should schools manage distancing during snacks and meals when masks are off?

Students in grades PreK-6 need to be at least 3 feet apart while eating/drinking. Students in grades 7-12 need to be at least 6 feet apart. Masks should be worn during mealtimes anytime students are not actually eating or drinking. Masks should be on when students are receiving their meals and when they are disposing of their trash and trays. Masks should only be removed when students are about to start eating and they should be replaced as soon as students are done eating.