



# RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

## Health and Safety Guide

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**February 2021**



**(This replaces the August 2020 Health and Safety Guide)**

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The Howard County Public School System Return to Work Guide is based on the guidelines provided in the Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education; adheres to the phased reopening guidelines outlined by Governor Larry Hogan in Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery, and aligns with CDC and Howard County Health Department guidance. This information will continue to be updated as we learn more and establish new practices and policies. The following guidelines are applicable to all HCPSS facilities, including school and administrative buildings.

# PHASED REOPENING & IMPACT ON HCPSS OPERATIONS

Governor Larry Hogan's [Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery](#) presents a three-stage reopening plan. On September 4, 2020, the Governor moved Maryland to Phase 3 – Low Risk.

## FOR HCPSS EMPLOYEES, THIS WILL MEAN:

In Phase 3, our worksites are open for employees to work. At its work session on January 26, 2021, the Howard County Board of Education approved a phased-in hybrid model for students to return to school in person. The approved model will bring staff and students back to in-person instruction over the course of four phases beginning March 1, 2021. In alignment with that decision, **on Tuesday, February 16, 2021, HCPSS will move from Step 2 to Step 3 of the Central Office Reoccupation plan.** Under this step, up to 25% of Central Office staff will work on-site each day, as determined by their supervisor. If you are unsure of when you are required to return to the school and office buildings, please contact your supervisor. Staff may not bring their children into the buildings.

A move to Step 4 within the next few weeks/months is possible, but will be announced beforehand. Under Step 4, up to 50% of Central Office Staff will work on-site each day.

**All employees are required to wear a face covering or mask in open areas of HCPSS buildings and whenever social distancing cannot be maintained.** More details on personal protective equipment (PPE) are detailed below.

Visitors are generally not permitted. Visitors should make an appointment prior to arriving at an HCPSS site. All buildings will be supplied with disposable masks for visitors who do not have one. Protocols for scheduling and receiving visitors are detailed below.

**Visitors to HCPSS facilities must wear a face covering or mask.**

<b>HCPSS STEP 2</b>	Employees are required to complete SafeSchools training to acknowledge they understand their responsibilities to practice health and safety protocols required by HCPSS in physical worksites.
	Most employees will continue to telework. Supervisors will ensure that social distancing can be maintained for employees who work on-site, including potentially implementing alternating shifts or block scheduling.
	Face coverings or masks are required for employees on-site when social distancing cannot be maintained. This includes hallways and other common areas.
	Employees on-site must practice social distancing and limit gathering size to 50 or fewer, in spaces that can safely accommodate the attendees (e.g. auditorium).
	Virtual meetings and gatherings are encouraged.

<b>HCPSS STEP 3</b>	Employees are required to complete SafeSchools training to acknowledge they understand their responsibilities to practice health and safety protocols required by HCPSS in physical worksites.
	Employees will start returning to office and school buildings. Central Office will have 25% occupancy. Social distancing should be maintained for employees who work on-site, including potentially implementing alternating shifts or block scheduling.
	Face coverings or masks are required for employees, especially when social distancing cannot be maintained. This includes cubicles, hallways, common areas and outside spaces.
	Employees on-site must practice social distancing and limit gathering size to 50 or fewer, in spaces that can safely accommodate the attendees (e.g. auditorium).
	Virtual meetings and gatherings are encouraged.

<b>HCPSS STEP 4</b>	Employees are required to complete SafeSchools training to acknowledge they understand their responsibilities to practice health and safety protocols required by HCPSS in physical worksites.
	More employees will start returning to office and school buildings. Central Office will have 50% occupancy. Social distancing should be maintained for employees who work on-site, including potentially implementing alternating shifts or block scheduling.
	Face coverings or masks are required for employees, especially when social distancing cannot be maintained. This includes cubicles, hallways, common areas and outside spaces.
	Employees on-site must practice social distancing and limit gathering size to 50 or fewer, in spaces that can safely accommodate the attendees (e.g. auditorium).
	Virtual meetings and gatherings are encouraged.

# PREPARING HCPSS BUILDINGS & WORK AREAS

## INDOOR AIR QUALITY

The Office of Building Maintenance has ensured that all heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), and plumbing systems are operating properly. HVAC filters were upgraded to improve filtration levels. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), it is not necessary to clean ventilation systems beyond the routine and preventative maintenance performed as part of reducing the risk of coronavirus transmission.

## ENHANCED CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

Measures have been implemented to ensure that common work areas and equipment, and personal workspaces, are regularly cleaned and disinfected.

Operations management has worked closely with HCPSS custodians to adjust their cleaning processes to better address current considerations. HCPSS custodians are using effective cleaning and disinfectant products to clean our facilities every day. Along with these measures, they are taking the following steps to maximize our disinfecting efforts:

- Refreshed Cleaning Methods/Processes - HCPSS cleaning personnel are cleaning and disinfecting restrooms more frequently. Their enhanced cleaning protocol includes thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces, doors, toilets, and handles, and ensuring that all supplies are fully stocked.
- Increased Cleaning of High-Touch Surfaces/Points. HCPSS cleaning crews are disinfecting high-touch surfaces/points thoroughly (i.e., door handles, glass, elevators buttons, doors, tables, chairs, light switches). Daytime custodians have been instructed to frequently disinfect all touch points throughout the day. In addition, HCPSS will increase daytime custodian coverage where appropriate, depending on building occupancy.





## SUPPLIES

Hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes or disinfectant spray/liquid will be available to all employees. Purchasing will coordinate the procurement and inventory of any additional sanitizer and other necessary supplies.

## INSTALLING PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

HCPSS has implemented facilities changes to provide an extra level of protection for staff, students and the public, including the installation of plexiglass barriers at customer service counters. Operations management will work with supervisors and staff to identify ongoing needs.

## VISITOR PROTOCOL

Visitors are not permitted under the infectious disease management plan. Exceptions are made for emergency services, contractors, and special situations. Facility special visitors will be limited and should occur by scheduled appointment only. No walk-in visitors are permitted. As much as possible, appointments to meet with parents and customers should be accommodated via telephone, video conference, or other suitable technology. When a face-to-face visit is necessary, the school or office must schedule an appointment time with the visitor and follow the following steps:

- Once the visitor has arrived at the building and parked, they must call the school/office to check-in and answer the screening questions while waiting in their vehicle.
- The administrator, or person admitting the visitor, must ask the following health screening questions and keep a record thereof.

YES or NO, since your last day of school/work/visitation, have you experienced any of the following symptoms?	Yes	No
A fever of 100.4°F or higher?		
Any use of fever reducing medication within the last 3 days?		
A new cough that is not due to another health condition?		
New shortness of breath or difficulty breathing that is not due to another health condition?		
New chills that are not due to another health condition?		
A new sore throat that is not due to another health condition?		
New muscle aches that are not due to another health condition, or that may have been caused by a specific activity (such as physical exercise)?		
A new loss of taste or smell?		
Have you had a positive test for the virus that causes COVID-19 disease within the past 10 days?		
In the past 14 days, have you had close contact (within approximately 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?		
In the last 14 days, have you traveled to an area that has been experiencing a prolonged rise in the number of COVID-19 cases?		

- If visitors are suspected to be sick and/or have recently experienced COVID-19 symptoms, they are not permitted to enter the building and must reschedule. Visitors who pass the health screening should be instructed to access the building through the front doors or appropriately designated entrance and be greeted by an employee, who will wear a mask, for escort to the appointment.
- Visitors must wear a mask or face covering, enter the building alone, and follow social distancing guidelines. Any family members or friends accompanying the visitor will be asked to remain outside or in a vehicle.

# PREPARING THE TEAM

## EMPLOYEE AGREEMENT

HCPSS employees are required to complete COVID-19 Workplace Reentry training to acknowledge they understand their responsibilities as we reopen our physical worksites.

## COVID-19 SCREENING PROTOCOL: EMPLOYEE HEALTH SELF-CHECK

Prior to arriving to the building each day, employees should self-monitor their symptoms by checking their temperature and answering these questions before reporting to work.

The self-check does not need to be documented.

YES or NO, since your last day of school/work/visitation, have you had any of the following symptoms?	Yes	No
A fever of 100.4°F or higher?		
Any use of fever reducing medication within the last 3 days?		
A new cough that is not due to another health condition?		
New shortness of breath or difficulty breathing that is not due to another health condition?		
New chills that are not due to another health condition?		
A new sore throat that is not due to another health condition?		
New muscle aches that are not due to another health condition, or that may have been caused by a specific activity (such as physical exercise)?		
A new loss of taste or smell?		
Have you had a positive test for the virus that causes COVID-19 disease within the past 10 days?		
In the past 14 days, have you had close contact (within approximately 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with someone with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19?		
In the last 14 days, have you traveled to an area that has been experiencing a prolonged rise in the number of COVID cases?		

**If an employee answers YES** to any of the screening questions, the employee should stay home and not report to work.

## SOCIAL DISTANCING

Employees should continue to maintain six feet of distance between themselves and coworkers where possible. Meetings should be held virtually whenever possible. Administration should ensure that a social distancing process is in place at entrances and other high-traffic areas. Employees should not bring guests or other family members into HCPSS facilities. Gatherings should continue to be limited to 50 or fewer people.

## SAFE WORKPLACE BEHAVIORS

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure. In accordance with guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), everyone is encouraged to:

- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Avoid close contact – practice social/physical distancing.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when near others.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Clean and disinfect your personal work area as necessary.
- Stay home when sick.

We encourage everyone to monitor their health symptoms and follow care instructions from their healthcare provider and local health department.



## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

The CDC's guidance on [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) includes additional considerations for employers, including developing policies for worker protection and providing training to all cleaning staff on site in advance of resuming cleaning tasks.

Appropriate use of PPE and other supplies is an essential component as we scale up operations. HCPSS will follow Howard County Health Department (HCHD), Maryland Department of Health, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines on PPE optimization. Specific guidance for your office or work area should be obtained from your manager. In general:

- Face coverings or masks are required for employees on-site, especially when social distancing cannot be maintained. This includes hallways and other common areas.
- Practice hand hygiene prior to placing or adjusting and after removing your face covering or mask, using soap and water, or hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cloth face coverings can be washed but other masks should be disposed of as regular trash.



## PERSONAL SPACE/ WORK AREACLEANING

Common work spaces are cleaned every evening, but employees should use extra care to disinfect shared equipment and high contact surfaces more frequently. Areas where additional cleaning should be undertaken include, but are not limited to:

- Kitchen: Microwave and refrigerator door handles, faucets, etc.
- Copy machine keypads.
- Tools.
- Work benches, equipment guard handles, etc.
- Shared equipment such as laptops, projectors and other devices. (Spray on cloth first, then wipe).
- Keyboards and computer mice.



Consider creating a regular cleaning schedule, in collaboration with your coworkers, supervisors, and program managers for common areas and shared equipment. Disinfecting solution, wipes, etc., will

be readily available in areas where frequent sanitizing is necessary. If your department does not have these supplies available, work with custodial personnel to order.

## EMPLOYEE EXPOSURE

If an employee is exposed or potentially exposed to COVID-19, either in the workplace or at home, the employee should notify their supervisor, who should in turn contact Health Services. The employee should follow HCHD or HCPSS guidance to self-quarantine and monitor health for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days from the date of last exposure. Exposure is defined as 15 minutes of close contact (within 6 feet), with or without a mask, with someone who has tested positive for COVID within the last 48 hours. If you are not sure whether you have been exposed, please contact your own physician for advice.



## IF AN EMPLOYEE TESTS POSITIVE

Employees are required to stay home if they are sick or have been quarantined, and to report any symptoms to their supervisor. However, there may still be instances of potential exposure in the workplace. If an employee is tested and is confirmed to have COVID-19, the HCHD will initiate a contact investigation, which would include the workplace if it were determined that exposures have occurred there.

HCHD staff will determine the infectious period, identify any contacts the employee may have had and make any recommendations for isolation or quarantine of people who had been in close contact for a period of 14 days. HCHD will notify HCPSS Health Department staff once an investigation was conducted and make any additional recommendations that are necessary, including any notifications that may need to occur or cleaning requirements for the facility. Information that could identify an individual in an investigation is kept confidential to protect privacy.

# HCPSS EMPLOYEE SUPPORT

Supervisors should refer employees to the HCPSS Counseling and Support Services program (formerly EAP) as needed, particularly if employees are returning to work after dealing with COVID-related illnesses or deaths in their families.

HCPSS has developed numerous resources to assist and support employees during the coronavirus pandemic. Employees should familiarize themselves with these resources and take advantage of them as needed. More information on the Coronavirus is available for staff by contacting Human Resources.

## LEAVE

Congress passed legislation in 2020 that placed mandates on HCPSS' leave programming in response to our current health crisis. The FFCRA (Families First Coronavirus Response Act), that required HCPSS to provide employees with paid sick leave and expanded family medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19, expired December 31, 2020.

Employees requesting leave are to follow normal HCPSS policies for leave and absences.

## COUNSELING AND SUPPORT SERVICES PROGRAM

The HCPSS Counseling and Support Services program (formerly called Employee Assistance Program, or EAP) provided by GuidanceResources® gives employees and family members access to professional, free and confidential counseling and support services to manage their needs. The program provides resources to improve your finances, schedule counseling sessions, develop strategies for navigating stress, and much more. Employees and family members can receive up to six free counseling sessions (including assessment, follow-up and referral services) per person, per episode, per year. COVID-19 related supports are available as well. Employees can visit the Staff Hub to learn more and create an account.

## RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYEES

Employees are encouraged to bookmark the following webpages for the latest information regarding HCPSS operations during the pandemic:

- [2020-2021 School Year Communication](#)
- [SafeSchools COVID-19 Work Reentry Training](#)
- [Howard County Health Department Alerts](#)

## PRIVACY

HCPSS will continue to provide employees with additional resources and advance notifications of changes in policies and procedures, so that employees may learn more about the situation as it develops and can prepare effectively. This is especially important for employees who will be returning to a workplace that may be configured very differently and/or may have fewer employees.

Lastly, HCPSS is mindful of privacy issues. We treat all employee personal information as confidential under state and federal law and will ensure appropriate measures are implemented to protect the privacy of employee medical information.

Maintaining the confidentiality of all such information is consistent with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidance, and is considered important even though an employer is not a “covered entity” under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Similarly, while an employer may need to quarantine an employee who tests positive for COVID-19 after returning to work (or indicates that he or she recently tested positive for COVID-19), HCPSS will share the employee’s name only with a public health agency, not with co-workers.

This *Return to the Workplace Health and Safety Guide* document will be updated as necessary.

