

Playground Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs

Children of all ages need to move their bodies and stay physically active. Getting outside for fresh air and movement is important to support physical and mental health on a daily basis. This guidance was developed to help schools and child care programs (public, private, and family settings) implement infection prevention measures to protect children and staff health during recess, physical activity, and playground use during community transmission of COVID-19.

Promote health

- Help children reach at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day.
- Wash hands before and after outdoor playground time.
- Provide education about and demonstration of proper handwashing.
- Talk with children about how to stay healthy – avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth and covering their cough.
- Provide age appropriate activities/games for children to learn about taking care of their bodies and helping their peers stay healthy, too!

Playgrounds

Like other outdoor activities, going to a public playground is allowed under the Stay Safe Order. Families and guardians should be careful to ensure children wash hands after touching play structures and maintain 6 feet of space from other children as much as possible. Although the Governor's order does not close playgrounds, it is up to local authorities to determine whether they choose to close public playgrounds in their cities and communities.

School playgrounds are located on Independent School District property. School and child care playgrounds are owned by those facilities, not by city municipalities. Family child care providers may have their own play structures on their property. Districts and all child care settings are encouraged to continue to use playground facilities for children in their care and utilize strategies to limit possible

exposures. Decisions about their open and/or closure status is up to the discretion of the individual district or child care provider.

Considerations for playground use

Schools and child care programs will need to assess whether or not the play structure (configuration) can support groups of children along with additional processes for proper handwashing (before/after) and cleaning of high-touch structure areas.

- Offer outdoor play in staggered shifts. If multiple groups are outside at the same time, they should have a minimum of 6 feet of open space between outdoor play areas or visit these areas in shifts so that they are not congregating. **Always wash hands immediately after outdoor playtime.**
- Keep groups together – maintain the same groups from day to day. This will help reduce potential exposures and may prevent an entire program from shutting down if exposure occurs.

Source: Washington State Department of Health

Cleaning playground and equipment

Guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that outdoor areas like playgrounds in schools and parks generally require normal routine cleaning, but do not require disinfection. Focus cleaning efforts on plastic or metal high-touch surfaces where hands frequently make direct contact like grab bars and railings between groups of children. It is not practical to disinfect entire large playground structures, and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public. Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.

Establish daily routines for cleaning playground equipment such as rubber balls, jump ropes, etc. Set up a system and educate children about how to care for equipment when they start and end play. Label containers for clean, unused playground equipment and for equipment that needs to be cleaned. Consider color code or label with simple symbols so children of all ages can help with this daily activity.

Resources

- [CDC: Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)
- [CDC: Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open – Supplemental Guidance \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html)

Active recess

Engaging children in active recess is another way to create opportunities for physical activity and time outdoors that is not dependent on shared equipment.

Teach and facilitate games that limit physical contact

- Introduce games such as relays, red light/green light, obstacle courses based on activities rather than equipment, etc.
- Start walking and running clubs or dance competitions.
- Organize track and field type of events (e.g., long jump).
- Playground rotating circuit challenges – individual activity stations.
- Be creative! Seek additional input from physical education teachers for more ideas.

Additional resources

- [SHAPE America: Strategies for Recess in Schools](https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/strategies_for_recess_in_schools.aspx)
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- [Minnesota Department of Education: Active Schools](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/act/MDE059014)
(<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/act/MDE059014>)
- Explore the Games Library and find other resources for active recess. [Playworks: Resources](https://www.playworks.org/resources/)
(<https://www.playworks.org/resources/>)
- This tool could map specific play zones to maintain social distancing. [Recess Lab: Map Your Playground](https://www.recesslab.org/resources/map-your-playground/) (<https://www.recesslab.org/resources/map-your-playground/>)



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