

Gardner Public Schools

Dr. Mark J. Pellegrino, *Superintendent*



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Dear Gardner Public Schools Community,

Attached are the FINALIZED COVID-19 Protocols to open school for the fall 2021 school year. As I stated in my previous correspondence, my primary goal in developing these protocols was to minimize the possibility of in-school transmissions, and maximize our chances of staying open with our students in person, five full days each week.

As many of you are aware, *Commissioner Riley has mandated masks* for all public schools in Massachusetts until at least October 1. Our masking policy complies with this mandate. Additionally, the Safety Committee will keep me apprised of vaccination rates at our high schools. Should the rate reach 80% after October 1, I will revisit masking for high school students and staff who are vaccinated, assuming this is still in effect. However, with only approximately 40% of the high school currently vaccinated, this will not be happening any time soon.

Effective immediately and until further notice, all staff, students, and visitors (other than those with approved medical or behavioral exemptions) must be masked and follow the Face Masking Protocol while in any of our schools.

Finally, thank you for your comments regarding our protocols. These concerns are addressed in the attached “Frequently Asked Questions” document. If you have further questions, feel free to email or call my office. Additionally, we did update two of our protocols based on your feedback. Specifically, we:

- Will now allow students who have a close contact outside of the school to “Test and Stay” as well as students who are close contacts in school; and
- Will only allow students who are close contacts to “Test and Stay” if they can follow our safety protocols.

I am truly excited to start the new school year with kids in our buildings, and conditions much closer to “normal.” As always, thank you for your patience, understanding, and support, as we navigate our schools through these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

Mark J. Pellegrino

Gardner Public Schools

COVID-19 Protocols

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Shouldn't the parents/guardians have a say as to whether or not their children wear a mask in school?

Response: While at school, the district is responsible for the safety and well-being of all attending children. We have the authority and responsibility to make decisions that will support the safety and well-being of *all* students. Again citing the CDC research, masks not only reduce the chances of your child breathing the virus in, they also reduce the number of particles your child will put into circulation. This means the mask is not only there to protect your child, it also protects others should your child have the virus. While transmissions are on the rise, this is the only logical decision to keep students safe and be in school, full-time.

Question: Is there evidence that shows masks reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus?

Response: This excerpt with citations was taken from the [CDC website](#). Please visit their website for the full text and citations.

At least ten studies have confirmed the benefit of universal masking in community level analyses: in a unified hospital system,⁴² a German city,⁴³ two U.S. states,^{44, 45} a panel of 15 U.S. states and Washington, D.C.,^{46, 47} as well as both Canada⁴⁸ and the U.S.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ nationally. Each analysis demonstrated that, following directives from organizational and political leadership for universal masking, new infections fell significantly. Two of these studies^{46, 47} and an additional analysis of data from 200 countries that included the U.S.⁵¹ also demonstrated reductions in mortality. Another 10-site study showed reductions in hospitalization growth rates following mask mandate implementation⁴⁹. A separate series of cross-sectional surveys in the U.S. suggested that a 10% increase in self-reported mask wearing tripled the likelihood of stopping community transmission.⁵³ An economic analysis using U.S. data found that, given these effects, increasing universal masking by 15% could prevent the need for lockdowns and reduce associated losses of up to \$1 trillion or about 5% of gross domestic product.⁴⁷

Two studies have been improperly characterized by some sources as showing that surgical or cloth masks offer no benefit. A community-based randomized control trial in Denmark during 2020 assessed whether the use of surgical masks reduced the SARS-CoV-2 infection rate among wearers (personal protection) by more than 50%. Findings were inconclusive,⁵⁴ most likely because the actual reduction in infections was lower. The study was too small (i.e., enrolled about 0.1% of the population) to assess whether masks could decrease transmission from wearers to others (source control). A second study of 14 hospitals in Vietnam during 2015 found that cloth masks were inferior to surgical masks for protection against clinical upper respiratory illness or laboratory-confirmed viral infection.⁵⁵ The study had a number of limitations including the lack of a true control (no mask) group for comparison, limited source control as hospitalized patients and staff were not masked, unblinded study arm assignments potentially biasing self-reporting of illness, and the washing and re-use of cloth masks by users

introducing the risk of infection from self-washing. A follow up study in 2020 found that healthcare workers whose cloth masks were laundered by the hospital were protected equally as well as those that wore medical masks.⁵⁶

Question: Are masks safe for my child to wear all day?

Response: The [Center for Disease Control](#) (CDC) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) both recommend that children wear face masks in school. They both support that mask wearing by children is safe and highly effective in decreasing the transmission of the Coronavirus. We are following the recommendations of the medical professionals to reduce the likelihood of transmission and provide the best chances for schools to stay open, providing in-person instruction. Studies of mask safety are listed on the CDC website, listed above.

Question: What will lunches look like?

Response: Lunches are when students will feel the school is even closer to “normal.” While our elementary schools will still be eating in the classrooms, our middle and high schools will be eating in the cafeterias. With usually a little less than fifteen actual minutes to eat, students will be able to unmask, eat, and socialize with their peers with less than six feet of social distancing without necessarily being considered close contacts. We have purchased additional air filters to accommodate this change in the middle and high schools. Please note: parents/guardians of middle/high school may contact the principal to have their child participate in a quiet lunch in an alternative area that ensures six feet of social distancing.

Question: Can my child wear a face shield instead of a mask?

Response: For children with a medical or behavioral exemption, a face shield can be considered on a case-by-case basis. If you are concerned about your child wearing a face mask because of a physical or behavioral issue, please talk with your child’s doctor and your school’s nurse.

Question: What are the consequences if my child does not comply with the masking protocols?

Response: In general, our K-12 students have had no significant issues wearing masks. We have found that many of our Pre-K students struggled to keep them on. Our professional teachers work with our littlest learners to encourage and help them follow the protocol to the best of the child’s ability. While the littlest learners would not have “consequences” outside of redirection, support, and encouragement, older children are expected to wear their masks. Older children, after redirection, encouragement, and support, may face appropriate progressive, age-appropriate consequences for non-compliance, up to and including suspension.

Question: Shouldn’t children who come in close contact with someone who tested positive stay out of school for a quarantine period? What is “Test and Stay?”

Response: We are looking for any opportunity to allow students and staff to participate in in-person learning safely. Below we have listed out the actual flow chart outlining options when an individual is considered a close contact with someone (when to “Test and Stay” versus quarantine). “Test and Stay” is a safe option because the rapid antigen test detects the viral protein in the individual even when symptoms are not present. If the viral protein is present, the individual will need to isolate at home for ten days. If there is no viral protein detected, AND the individual can follow all safety protocols, AND the individual has no symptoms, only then can they stay in school. “Test and Stay” provides an opportunity for children and staff with a low risk of transmission to attend school. Any student participating in “Test and Stay” or any of our other testing options will need consent.

Question: My child will be traveling outside of Massachusetts, but in the United States. How will the Travel Protocol impact their absences?

Response: Please refer to the revised Travel Protocol below. We will have the “Test and Stay” option for students that have consent and do not have symptoms of COVID-19. Vaccinated staff and students traveling within the United States, may come to school and are not required to “Test and Stay.” Unvaccinated staff and students who travel outside of Massachusetts, and vaccinated individuals who travel outside of the United States, may “Test and Stay,” or quarantine for ten days. Days out for quarantine are considered “excused absent.”

Question: What options do you have for families that disagree with the mask mandate, or have children who are too young to get vaccinated?

Response: Whether vaccinated or not, all children and staff without a verified medical or behavioral condition that precludes them from wearing a mask must follow the mask protocol.

Question: What are the backup plans if my child has to isolate or quarantine, or if the school has to close down?

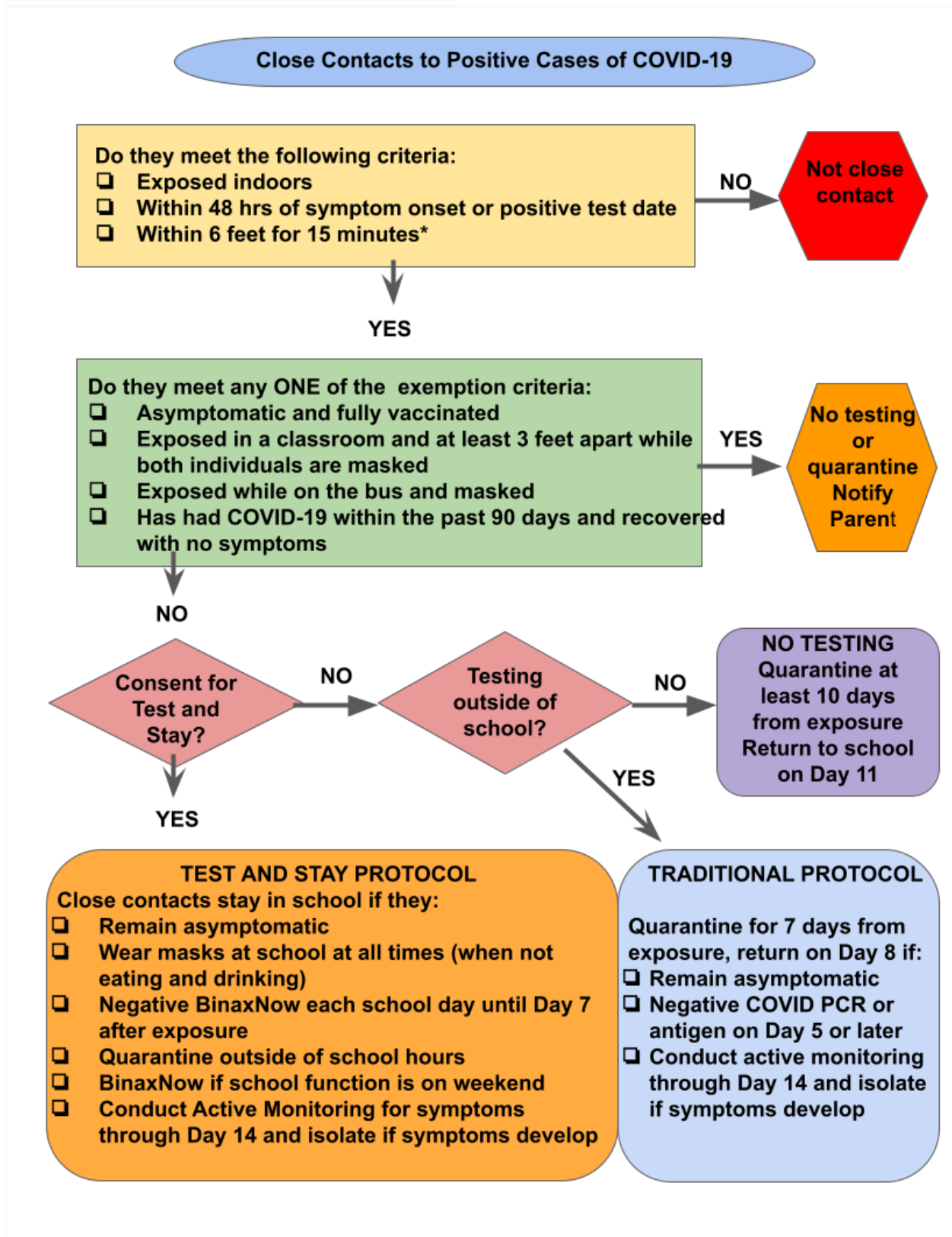
Response: If a child develops COVID-19 and needs to isolate, teachers will make work accessible via online means. If we need to close down because of significant transmissions, we are now prepared to provide remote learning, should that become absolutely necessary.

Question: Can COVID-19 testing happen before school starts?

Response: Unfortunately, no. We do not have the capability to begin testing before school starts. We anticipate that testing will begin the week of September 6th. That is the earliest we could begin. Paper and electronic consent will be sent out soon.

Question: Are the chemicals used for safe for children to be around?

Response: All chemicals used comply with safety requirements set for schools. Our cleaning company, Moura’s Cleaning, does not use bleach, or other chemicals that could create a physical reaction.



Gardner Public Schools

Face Mask/Face Covering Protocol for staff and students

In accordance with policy EBCFA: Face Coverings, all Gardner Public School staff, students, and visitors, are required to wear a face mask or a cloth face covering in school buildings and on school transportation, even when social distancing is observed. When outside, staff and students are not required to wear face coverings regardless of distance from others. Staff and students are required to wear their own mask into school each day. The mask/face covering should be washed daily, at home, by hand or washing machine, and dried. It must cover the mouth and nose and fit securely, not allowing gaps or spaces around the outside edges. The district has purchased "replacement masks", which will be available for those needing a new one during the school day. Should the mask become visibly soiled on the outside or not fit correctly, a replacement mask should be worn.

Individuals may be excused from wearing a face mask/face covering for the following reasons, per CDC guidance:

The individual:

- cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance
- is having difficulty breathing
- has a documented medical or behavioral health condition that inhibits them from wearing a mask or face covering. Alternative Personal Protective Equipment should be considered for these individuals, if possible, such as a face shield. Gardner Public Schools may require documentation of conditions to exclude a staff or student from this requirement.
- is working alone in a classroom with the window open and the door to the hallway is closed. Staff working in this manner must post a sign on the door to prevent people from entering the room while they are not wearing a mask

When appropriate social distancing is enforced inside the school building, masks may be removed at the following times:

- **during mask breaks-** unmasked individuals should try to maintain six feet of social distancing whenever possible. When 6 feet of distancing is not possible without masks on, assigned seating must be in place to facilitate contact tracing when necessary. To avoid exposure for 15 minutes or longer without masks on, indoor mask breaks should be kept brief when students are not able to be socially distanced to 6 feet.
- **while eating and drinking** -Whenever students or staff are unmasked for any reason, including eating/drinking, they should make every effort to maintain six feet of social

distancing. However, the district realizes that schools will need to utilize lunchrooms in order to have students participate in a full day of school. The district also realizes that six feet of social distancing is not possible in our lunchrooms. Therefore, in lunchrooms, schools will space students out as much as possible and have assigned seating to allow for expedient contact tracing when necessary. Families that are concerned about the lack of social distancing during lunch should contact their principal who will make every effort to find an alternative lunch area that will most likely be silent or solitary eating spaces, but allow for six feet of social distancing.

Designated mask breaks ***must occur*** throughout the day. When possible, mask breaks should be outside. Mask breaks can occur in the building/classroom as long as the individuals taking the mask break as close to six feet apart as possible and windows are open. Indoor mask breaks should be kept to a maximum of 5 minutes unless eating. Any student that states that they are in need of a mask break must be allowed to have one following the steps below. If an individual is requiring many mask breaks or mask breaks beyond 5 minutes at a time, please consult with the school nurse.

All school staff and students will follow these steps for hand hygiene and removing a mask prior to eating, drinking, or mask breaks inside the building:

1. ***Wash hands*** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and in accordance with the handwashing protocol or sanitize hands using Alcohol Based Hand Sanitizer. Handwashing with soap and water is preferable to alcohol based hand sanitizer prior to eating or handling food.
2. ***Sit at an assigned seat or assigned space*** , 6 feet from others, with a clean paper towel on the edge of the desk/table.
3. ***Remove the face mask*** by touching ear loops only and avoid touching the outside or inside of the mask
4. ***Place the mask on a clean surface*** with the outside of the mask down ***or hold it touching the ear loops only.***
5. ***While touching ear loops only, fold in half*** so the inside of the mask is inside the fold.
6. ***Eat, drink or have mask break***
7. ***Unfold mask*** touching ear loops only
8. ***Place mask onto face***, touching ear loops only
9. ***Wash hands*** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and in accordance with the handwashing protocol. Handwashing with soap and water is preferable to alcohol-based hand sanitizer after eating.

If students are in violation of this protocol, the building principal will consult with a parent/guardian to determine whether an exception is appropriate. If an exemption is not

appropriate the Principal will impose appropriate consequences for continued violations of this protocol.

Violations of this protocol by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations to district protocols.

Visitors in violation of this protocol will be denied entry to the school/district facility.

Revised 1 8/27/2021 RM

GARDNER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

COVID-19-TRAVEL PROTOCOL

Due to the increased risk of contracting COVID-19 during and after travel, Gardner Public Schools requests the following of any students or staff that are considering travel outside of Massachusetts. Along with this district protocol, those individuals should follow the Massachusetts Travel Advisory which can be seen [HERE](#).

Those traveling outside of MA to any other state in the US or out of the country will follow this protocol to return to school. If you are included in the MA exemptions please discuss with your school's nurse. Travelers in the following categories are exempt from this protocol, those who:

- Are fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and received their last vaccination 14 or more days ago
- Travel outside of MA for fewer than 24 hours
- Have had a positive test result for COVID-19 and completed the required isolation period and are within 90 days post infection
- Have a primary residence out of state or have visitation with a custodial parent/guardian

If a vaccinated student or staff member travels out of Massachusetts, but within the United States, that student or staff member does ***not*** need to test upon return to school, but should monitor symptoms. If the student or staff develops symptoms at any time they will call the school nurse and follow the [Gardner Public Schools Protocol for symptomatic individuals](#).

If an unvaccinated student or staff member travels outside of Massachusetts, but within the United States, that student or staff member will follow the test and stay protocol upon returning to school. Testing should occur with a Rapid Antigen test in the health office for 7 days after the return to Massachusetts. Providing that the tests are negative and the student or staff member remains asymptomatic they may stay in school. If the student or staff member refuses to test they will need to be absent from for a period of 10 days and return on day 11 which is consistent with an isolation period. If the student or staff develops symptoms at any time during the 7 day test and stay, they will need to call the school nurse and follow the [Gardner Public Schools Protocol for symptomatic individuals](#).

If an unvaccinated or vaccinated student or staff member travels outside of the United States, that student or staff member will follow the test and stay protocol upon returning to school. Testing should occur with a Rapid Antigen test in the health office for 7 days after the return to Massachusetts. Providing that the tests are negative and the student or staff member remains asymptomatic they may stay in school. If the student or staff member refuses to test they will need to be absent from for a period of 10 days and return on day 11 which is consistent with an isolation period. If the student or staff develops symptoms at any time during the 7 day test and stay, they will need to call the school nurse and follow the [Gardner Public Schools Protocol for symptomatic individuals](#).

Travel plans should be reported to the school nurse and building administrator prior to departure.

Updated: 8/19/2021

Gardner Public Schools Protocol COVID-19 Screening for Staff and Students

DAILY SCREENING/CHECKLIST LIST FOR STAFF, CAREGIVERS, AND STUDENTS

Each morning, staff and students/caregivers are responsible to review the following screening/checklist prior to leaving the house for school.

Unvaccinated individuals, who are presenting *any of the symptoms* on the COVID-19 Symptoms list below should stay home and call the school nurse.

Vaccinated individuals who are presenting any of *the first five symptoms* on the COVID-19 symptoms list below should stay home and call the school nurse.

COVID-19 symptoms list:

- **Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills**
- **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
- **New loss of taste or smell**
- **Muscle aches or body aches**
- **Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)**
- Sore throat, when in combination with other symptoms
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea when in combination with other symptoms
- Headache when in combination with other symptoms
- Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) when in combination with other symptoms

If none of the above are present, and your child has not had any close contact to an individual that has tested positive for COVID-19, complete the following checklist to ensure you are ready to come to school:

- Staff and students wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water including palms, backs of hands, in between fingers, around thumbs and wrists and fingertips/nails
- Staff/student wears a clean, dry mask that covers nose and mouth and fits securely around the face and chin not allowing any gaps or spaces around the sides
- Caregivers have a plan in place in case your child needs to be picked up from school.

GARDNER PUBLIC SCHOOL - HANDWASHING PROTOCOL

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) recommend frequent handwashing to reduce and limit the spread of COVID -19. If Handwashing facilities are not readily available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used with adult supervision.

WHEN SHOULD HANDS BE WASHED?

- *Entry and exit* from building
- *Entry and exit* from the classroom
- *Before and after* eating
- *After* sneezing, coughing or blowing nose
- *After* bathroom/toileting/diapering
- *Before* handling food
- *After* touching or cleaning contaminated surfaces
- *Before and After* using shared equipment (playground, toys, keyboards, phones)
- *After* contact with others
- *Before and after* medication administration
- *Before* entering vehicles
- *Before and after* contact with a facemask
- *Before and after* changes of gloves

HOW SHOULD HANDS BE WASHED?

- Wet your hands under water (warm or cold) and apply soap.
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean paper towel.
- Use your paper towel to turn off the water.

For a video example of this handwashing technique, visit the Gardner School Health Services, Gardner Ma Facebook page via this link: <https://www.facebook.com/1402627546673308/videos/1435836903289754/?t=0>

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU DO NOT HAVE SOAP AND WATER?

If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) are an effective alternative for cleaning hands and are recommended as an alternative to soap and water by the CDC and the Massachusetts DPH. Hand sanitizers that are not alcohol based are not recommended.

HOW DO YOU USE HAND SANITIZER?

- If hands are visibly soiled, wash hands with soap and water.
- If hands are not visibly soiled, apply the product to the palm of one hand (read the label to learn the correct amount).
- Rub your hands together with sanitizer over all surfaces of your hands, in between fingers, around thumbs, and over lower wrists until dry. This should take approximately 20 seconds.

Gardner Public School will have standing orders regarding the use of hand sanitizer. Parents may opt out of the use of hand sanitizer by sending in a letter with their student’s name to the school nurse at their school. For more information regarding handwashing please visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) When and How to Wash Your Hands at

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html#:~:text=Wet%20your%20hands%20with%20clean,for%20at%20least%2020%20seconds.>

GARDNER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PROTOCOL

*** TEACHER/STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES ***

Teachers' Personal Space: Using a sanitizing or disinfecting solution or wipe, wipe down the teacher desk and phone. Using an alcohol wipe, wipe keyboard, mouse, or technology as needed. NEVER SPRAY ANYTHING DIRECTLY ONTO TECHNOLOGY! ONLY USE SCHOOL SUPPLIED CLEANERS.

Student Space: Refer to COVID-19 Classroom Management Protocol for sanitizing student spaces in classrooms.

*** CLEANING COMPANY RESPONSIBILITIES ***

All products will be applied according to manufacturers' recommendations. Moura's will provide the district with the product sheets and the Safety Data Sheet before their use.

GENERAL CLASSROOMS and LIBRARIES

Daily:

- Wipe down High Touch Surfaces with cleaning solution. (High Touch Surfaces include: door handles/knobs, push bars, elevator buttons, student desks, student chairs, light switches, sinks and surrounding areas, countertops, water filling stations, faucets, toilets, all bathroom fixtures, and handrails.
- Dust mop all hard floors.
- Vacuum carpeting and remove all spots.
- Sweep and wet mop rooms with kitchen facilities and all bathrooms.

Upon Request:

Any time an individual has tested positive for COVID-19 and was present during infectious period or at the request of a nurse, or at the request of a school nurse or administrator, custodial staff will disinfect all High Touch Surfaces and other requested surfaces using an Electrostatic Sprayer. Custodians shall be trained in the use of the electrostatic sprayers and shall wear N95 masks when using them.

High Touch Surfaces include: door handles/knobs, push bars, elevator buttons, student desks, student chairs, light switches, sinks and surrounding areas, countertops, water filling stations, faucets, toilets, all bathroom fixtures, and handrails.

PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Daily

- After morning session and again after afternoon session, custodial staff will wipe down High Touch Surfaces with soap and water. High Touch Surfaces include: door handles/knobs, push bars, elevator buttons, student desks, student chairs, light switches, sinks and surrounding areas, countertops, water filling stations, faucets, toilets, all bathroom fixtures, and handrails.
- Dust mop all hard floors.
- Vacuum carpeting and remove all spots after afternoon sessions.
- Sweep and wet mop rooms and all bathrooms after afternoon sessions.

NURSE, COUNSELING & RELATED SERVICES OFFICES

Daily:

- Wipe down High Touch Surfaces with soap and water.
- High Touch Surfaces include: door handles/knobs, push bars, elevator buttons, student desks, student chairs, light switches, sinks and surrounding areas, countertops, water filling stations, faucets, toilets, all bathroom fixtures, and handrails. Dust mop all hard floors.
- Vacuum carpeting and remove all spots.
- Sweep and wet mop rooms with kitchen facilities and all bathrooms

KITCHEN AND CAFETERIA SPACES, AND ALL BATHROOMS

Daily:

- Wipe down High Touch Surfaces with soap and water. All High Touch Surfaces will be sprayed with a disinfectant solution on the EPA “N” List for Coronavirus. High Touch Surfaces include: door handles/knobs, push bars, elevator buttons, student desks, student chairs, light switches, sinks and surrounding areas, countertops, water filling stations, faucets, toilets, all bathroom fixtures, and handrails. Dust mop all hard floors.
- Vacuum carpeting and remove all spots.

- Sweep and wet mop rooms with kitchen facilities and all bathrooms

RESPONSE TO CALM-DOWN ROOM USE, OR AS DIRECTED BY NURSE IN RESPONSE TO A SYMPTOMATIC INDIVIDUAL

- Wipe down High Touch Surfaces with soap and water. At the request of school staff, all surfaces of the calm-down room will be sprayed with a disinfectant solution using an Electrostatic Sprayer. Custodians shall be trained in the use of the electrostatic sprayers and shall wear N95 masks when using them.
- Dust mop all hard floors.
- Vacuum carpeting and remove all spots.
- Sweep and wet mop rooms with kitchen facilities and all bathrooms.

Resources on cleaning and disinfecting schools:

Click [HERE](#) for Centers of Disease Control (CDC) Six Steps for Properly Cleaning and Disinfecting Your School Poster

Click [HERE](#) for CDC guidance on cleaning and disinfecting public facilities

Revised 8/19/2021