

Notice of Emergency Rule

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Division of Disease Control

RULE NO.: RULE TITLE:

64DER21-12 Protocols for Controlling COVID-19 in School Settings

SPECIFIC REASONS FOR FINDING AN IMMEDIATE DANGER TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY OR WELFARE: Because a recent increase in COVID-19 infections, largely due to the spread of the COVID-19 delta variant, coincides with the imminent start of the school year, it is imperative that state health and education authorities provide emergency guidance to school districts concerning the governance of COVID-19 protocols in schools. Accordingly, pursuant to its authority to adopt rules governing the control of preventable communicable diseases in public schools, *see* section 1003.22(3), Florida Statutes, the Florida Department of Health, after consultation with the Department of Education, hereby promulgates an emergency rule regarding COVID-19 protocols in public schools to encourage a safe and effective in-person learning environment for Florida’s schoolchildren during the upcoming school year; to prevent the unnecessary removal of students from school; and to safeguard the rights of parents and their children.

This emergency rule conforms to Executive Order Number 21-175, which ordered the Florida Department of Health and the Florida Department of Education to ensure safety protocols for controlling the spread of COVID-19 in schools that (1) do not violate Floridians’ constitutional freedoms; (2) do not violate parents’ rights under Florida law to make health care decisions for their minor children; and (3) protect children with disabilities or health conditions who would be harmed by certain protocols, such as face masking requirements. The order, which is incorporated by reference, directs that any COVID-19 mitigation actions taken by school districts comply with the Parents’ Bill of Rights, and “protect parents’ right to make decisions regarding masking of their children in relation to COVID-19.”

Because of the importance of in-person learning to educational, social, emotional and mental well-being, removing healthy students from the classroom for lengthy quarantines should be limited at all costs. Under Florida law, parents have a fundamental right to direct the upbringing, education, health care, and mental health of their minor children and have the right to make health care decisions for their minor children. HB 241, Ch. 2021-199, Laws of Fla. In furtherance of the Florida Department of Health’s authority to adopt rules governing the control of preventable communicable diseases—and because students benefit from in-person learning—it is necessary to immediately promulgate a rule regarding COVID-19 safety protocols that protects parents’ rights and to allow for in-person education for their children. Removing children from school poses a threat to developmental upbringing and should not occur absent a heightened showing of illness or risk of illness to other students.

REASON FOR CONCLUDING THAT THE PROCEDURE IS FAIR UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES: This emergency rule is necessary in light of the recent rise in COVID-19 cases in Florida and the urgent need to provide COVID-19 guidance to school districts before the upcoming school year commences. Given that a majority of schools will resume in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year within the next four weeks, there is insufficient time to adopt the rule through non-emergency process.

SUMMARY: Emergency rule 64DER21-12 sets forth the procedures for controlling COVID-19 in school settings. **THE PERSON TO BE CONTACTED REGARDING THE EMERGENCY RULE IS:** Carina Blackmore, Florida Department of Health, 4052 Bald Cypress Way, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1703, (850)245-4732.

THE FULL TEXT OF THE EMERGENCY RULE IS:

64DER21-12 Protocols for Controlling COVID-19 in School Settings

(1) GENERAL PROTOCOLS AND DEFINITION. The following procedures should be instituted to govern the control of COVID-19 in public schools:

(a) Schools should encourage routine cleaning of classrooms and high-traffic areas.

(b) Students should be encouraged to practice routine handwashing throughout the day.

(c) Students should stay home if they are sick.

(d) Students may wear masks or facial coverings as a mitigation measure; however, the school must allow for a parent or legal guardian of the student to opt-out the student from wearing a face covering or mask.

(e) For purposes of this rule, "direct contact" means cumulative exposure for at least 15 minutes, within six feet.

(2) PROTOCOLS FOR SYMPTOMATIC OR COVID-19 POSITIVE STUDENTS. Students experiencing any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or who have received a positive diagnostic test for COVID-19 should not attend school, school-sponsored activities, or be on school property until:

(a) The student receives a negative diagnostic COVID-19 test and is asymptomatic; or

(b) Ten days have passed since the onset of symptoms or positive test result, the student has had no fever for 24 hours and the student's other symptoms are improving; or

(c) The student receives written permission to return to school from a medical doctor licensed under chapter 458, an osteopathic physician licensed under chapter 459, or an advanced registered nurse practitioner licensed under chapter 464.

(3) PROTOCOLS FOR STUDENTS WITH EXPOSURE TO COVID-19. Students who are known to have been in direct contact with an individual who received a positive diagnostic test for COVID-19 should not attend school, school-sponsored activities, or be on school property until:

(a) The student is asymptomatic and receives a negative diagnostic COVID-19 test after four days from the date of last exposure to the COVID-19 positive individual; or

(b) The student is asymptomatic and seven days have passed since the date of last exposure to the COVID-19 positive individual.

(c) If a student becomes symptomatic following exposure to an individual that has tested positive for COVID-19, the student should follow the procedures set forth in subsection (2), above.

(4) PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS WITH PRIOR COVID-19 INFECTION. A student who has received a positive diagnostic test for COVID-19 in the previous 90 days and who is known to have been in direct contact with an individual who has received a positive diagnostic test for COVID-19 is not subject to the protocols set forth in subsection (3), so long as the student remains asymptomatic. If a student with a previous COVID-19 infection becomes symptomatic, the student should follow the procedures set forth in subsection (2), above. This subsection applies equally to students that are fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

(5) TESTING. Any COVID-19 testing of minors at school requires informed written consent from a parent or legal guardian.

(6) NON-DISCRIMINATION. Students whose parents or legal guardian have opted them out of a mask or face covering requirement shall not be subject to any harassment or discriminatory treatment, including but not limited to:

(a) Relegation to certain physical locations;

(b) Isolation during school activities; or

(c) Exclusion from any school-sponsored events or activities.

Rulemaking Authority 1003.22(3) FS. Law Implemented 1003.22(3) FS. History—New.

THIS RULE TAKES EFFECT UPON BEING FILED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE UNLESS A LATER TIME AND DATE IS SPECIFIED IN THE RULE.

EFFECTIVE DATE:



Scott A. Rivkees, MD
State Surgeon General



Date