

**PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND
READINESS PLAN FOR CATHOLIC
SCHOOLS**

2021-22 ACADEMIC YEAR

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND
MINNEAPOLIS**

MOST RECENT REVISION: 8/2/2021

(Adapted and revised for Divine Mercy Catholic School)

INTRODUCTION

As Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis prepare for the 2021-2022 academic year, we are eager for the opportunity to partner with parents in the education of their children.

Beginning in March 2020, and continuing through the 2020-21 school year, our deep concern about the risks of COVID-19 and love of neighbor, along with our responsibility to adhere to the regulations issued through the legitimate authority of the State, prompted Catholic schools to impose unprecedented restrictions and requirements on teachers, students, and families. We did this in solidarity with the broader community in order to give the healthcare system an opportunity to prepare, to give the scientific community an opportunity to gain knowledge, and to give those who were most vulnerable an opportunity to receive a safe and effective vaccine.

The last eighteen months of educating during the global COVID-19 pandemic have taught us a lot about the implications of these restrictions and requirements. While some disease mitigation strategies have had minimal effect on children, we have also become much more aware of the disproportionate negative effects associated with others. Many of these mitigation strategies place a great burden on the well-being of children and families. Catholic schools of the Archdiocese have shown that we are willing to impose these burdens, and we remain willing to impose them when circumstances warrant.

Thankfully the circumstances surrounding the start of the upcoming year are very different from those we faced a year ago. As Catholic school educators who look broadly at all goods, we are confident that when we take all factors in to consideration, the following Pandemic Preparedness and Readiness Plan Template for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese prudently and proportionately applies public health strategies that will create the best environment for students to flourish physically, mentally, emotionally, academically, and spiritually in Catholic schools during the upcoming academic year as well as slow the spread of COVID-19. Guided by scientific findings, we are taking a broad multilayered strategic approach to disease mitigation rather than focusing on single strategies.

We continue to monitor the situation closely and will provide updates as needed. With the information that is currently available, including our successful experience offering in-person learning throughout the 2020-21 school year, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese will continue to responsibly plan and take the action steps outlined in the PPRP Template to lower the risk of COVID19 transmission. Further guidance from the State and legal mandates for nonpublic schools in Minnesota will be evaluated on an as needed basis through the academic year.

We pray for all our families and ask for the prayers of the entire Catholic school community as we all seek the wisdom and courage to continue the essential work for the sake of one of our noblest endeavors—the education of our children.

Pandemic Preparedness and Readiness Plan for Divine Mercy Catholic School 2021-22 Academic Year

1. At a minimum, and absent any legal mandates from the State of Minnesota for nonpublic schools, Divine Mercy Catholic School will implement the following strategies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during the 2021-2022 academic year:

Promoting Behaviors That Reduce the Spread of Disease

a) Students and employees are required to stay home when they are sick. Divine Mercy will promptly send children and employees home when they display symptoms of COVID-19 illness.

b) Divine Mercy Catholic School expects families and staff to complete a daily self-screening (*self-screening check list attached to this plan*) before coming to school. Staff and students with Covid like symptoms are asked to stay home. Parents are reminded to keep sick children home.

c) Divine Mercy Catholic School will teach and reinforce proper handwashing hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

d) In determining when students may return to school after an illness, Divine Mercy will follow our standard illness exclusion policy located in the parent/student handbook unless a student has a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19. Students with lab confirmed cases of COVID-19 are allowed to return to school when all of the following are true (Minnesota Department of Health, 2021):

- They feel better. Their cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms have substantially improved.
- It has been at least 10 days since they first felt sick or tested positive.
- They have had no fever for at least 24 hours, without using medicine that lowers fevers.

A similar illness-exclusion policy applies to all employees.

Like other infectious diseases, we will notify impacted families of a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19 in the classroom.

e) Divine Mercy Catholic School will continue to use a modified “cohort” model to keep students in grade level groups and reduce large group exposures.

f) Divine Mercy Catholic School has eliminated student attendance policy incentives that could cause a student to come to school when ill (e.g., “perfect attendance awards”). Responsive to our care for the whole child, we will work with students and families to provide additional assistance to students who have experienced prolonged absence due to illness.

Maintaining Healthy Facilities

- g) Divine Mercy Catholic School has continued to evaluate the operational capacity of our ventilation systems and will work to maintain adequate ventilation through the building.
- h) Divine Mercy Catholic School has a plan for daily cleaning and disinfecting, with protocols in place for areas that require sanitization.
- i) Divine Mercy Catholic School will provide adequate supplies for implementing our cleaning and disinfecting plan.
- j) Divine Mercy Catholic School will ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfecting products, including always storing products securely away from children and using products that meet EPA disinfecting criteria.

Maintaining Healthy Operations

- k) Divine Mercy Catholic School will follow Minnesota Rule 4605.7070 that requires any person in charge of any institution, school, childcare facility, or camp to report cases of COVID-19 to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) following procedures provided by MDH.
- l) Divine Mercy will prudently evaluate all plans for in-person group events, gatherings, and meetings during the school day with respect to the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- m) All visitors and vendors to school will follow all school-defined safety and personal hygiene procedures. Until the Pandemic has run its course, visits of volunteers, visitors, and vendors during the pandemic will be kept to the essential activities.
- n) Divine Mercy Catholic School will train all employees on the requirements of this PPRP.
- o) Divine Mercy Catholic School will continue to communicate to students, families, and employees all expectations related to this PPRP.
- p) Divine Mercy Catholic School will monitor compliance with these PPRP requirements in a practicable manner to help ensure adherence among students.
- q) All school masses and other liturgical services will follow the Archdiocesan protocols published by the Office of Worship which can be obtained from the pastor, chaplain, or priest-celebrant.

2. The Archdiocese has made the following recommendations to Catholic schools based on our shared wisdom of educating during the COVID-19 pandemic, the responsibility of parents as primary educators of their children, and the requirements of Minnesota Statutes. Divine Mercy Catholic School will follow these recommendations:

Vaccines: COVID-19 Vaccines are not required in Catholic schools of the Archdiocese. Schools should inform families of the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine and provide support for those families who desire to receive a vaccination.

COVID-19 Testing: Schools should inform families in writing of the availability of COVID-19 testing and the locations where testing is available and provide support for those families who desire to get tested. Catholic schools will not test students for COVID-19 or provide any other non-emergency health services to students without written parental consent.

Face Coverings: The State's legal mandate requiring face coverings in public and nonpublic schools expired at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. The Archdiocese does not require Catholic school students or employees to wear face coverings. Parents and guardians are well positioned to determine if their child should wear a face covering while outside of the home and out in the community. No student will be prevented from wearing a face covering. Catholic schools will work to reduce any stigmatization associated with the decision to wear or not wear a face covering.

At this time, the CDC has recommended the use of masks indoors for all individuals (regardless of vaccination status) in areas of "high" (positivity rate of over 10%) or "substantial" (positivity rate of 8-10%). Divine Mercy Catholic School will keep up to date local trends in our county and school community. Based on local circumstances, the pastor, canonical administrator, or competent board may institute a policy that further addresses this issue.

At this time, all people are required by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order to wear face coverings while in public transportation hubs and on all public transportation conveyances (airplanes, public buses, etc.), including school buses (both public and private).

Physical Distancing: Schools should promote public health recommendations for physical distancing provided they do not: 1) disproportionately impact child development or the educational goals of the school or 2) limit the school's ability to offer in-person learning to all of its students.

Contact Tracing: The responsibility for contact tracing lies with trained professionals at Minnesota Department of Health. Catholic schools should assist MDH by providing relevant information when requested.

Quarantine: Minnesota Department of Health no longer requires school leaders to quarantine individuals, entire classrooms, or groups of students on account of potential exposure to COVID19.

Closing Catholic School Buildings: The decision to temporarily close a Catholic school building due to concerns about the spread of an infectious disease should be made on the advice of competent public health authorities. Schools should promptly notify the Archdiocesan Office for the Mission of Catholic Education of the decision to close a Catholic school building.

Change in Learning Models: Schools should minimize changes to the in-person learning model for individual students, classrooms, and schools. Schools should only utilize the distance learning model when they have been advised by a competent public health authority to temporarily close a school building or classroom due to concerns about the spread of an infectious disease.

Communication to Parents Regarding Exposure to Infectious Disease: When students are potentially exposed to any infectious disease (including but not limited to COVID-19) at school, school leaders will notify parents following their infectious disease notification policy. At a minimum, schools should provide families with the communicable disease fact sheet available from the Infectious Diseases in Childcare Settings and Schools Manual.

3. Changes to this template will be communicated by the Archdiocese to Divine Mercy Catholic School on an as needed basis throughout the 2021-2022 school year. Divine Mercy will then notify parents and staff of the changes.

Daily Home Screening for Students

Parents: Please complete this short check each morning before your child leaves for school.

SECTION 1: Symptoms

If your child has any of the following symptoms, that indicates a possible illness that may decrease the student's ability to learn and also put them at risk for spreading illness to others. Please check your child for these symptoms:

- Temperature 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher when taken by mouth
- Sore throat
- Chills
- Loss of taste or smell
- Fatigue/Muscle pain
- New uncontrolled cough that causes difficulty breathing (for students with chronic allergic/ asthmatic cough, a change in their cough from baseline)
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or abdominal pain
- New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever

SECTION 2: Close Contact/Potential Exposure

- Had close contact (within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes) with a person with confirmed COVID-19
- Been advised by any medical provider/health authority that he/she has been exposed to Covid-19
- Traveled to or lived in an area where the local, Tribal, territorial, or state health department is reporting large numbers of COVID-19 cases.