



The Maryland School for the Blind

2022-23 COVID-19 MSB Response Plan

(updated 8/18/2022)

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Collaboration and Consultation

We are thankful for the consultation and advisement of Dr. Anamaria Bulatovic, MSB's Medical Director, the MSB medical team and other medical experts as well as collaboration and consultation with other stakeholders including the MSB senior management team, supervisors, our parents and staff, the MSB board members, PK Law, the Baltimore City Health Department, Maryland State Health Department, Baltimore City Public Schools Superintendent, the Superintendent of the Maryland School for the Deaf, and the other schools for the blind Superintendents through the Council of Schools and Services for the Blind (COSB).

Factors in Decision Making

The health and safety of staff and students, particularly for those who are vulnerable to severe COVID-19 illness, depends on a well-reasoned approach to policies, procedures, and mitigation strategies in order to most effectively prevent the spread of COVID-19 on our campus.

In the case of The Maryland School for the Blind, there are many students with underlying health conditions that put them at increased risk. In fact, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 200+ students enrolled at MSB, have underlying conditions that qualify them as at risk for severe COVID-19 disease. Because we also operate a residential program, there is more opportunity for disease to spread. Due to the vulnerable nature of many of our students, MSB may need to implement more cautious mitigation strategies in order to keep our community safe.

Prevalence

A primary consideration for safe in-person instruction is the prevalence of COVID-19 and the level of transmission in the MSB community and our capacity to safely staff classrooms.

CDC looks at the combination of three metrics — new COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population in the past 7 days, the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and total new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population in the past 7 days — to determine the COVID-19 community level. New COVID-19 admissions and the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied represent the current potential for strain on the health system. Data on new cases acts as an early warning indicator of potential increases in health system strain in the event of a COVID-19 surge.

Using these data, the COVID-19 community level is classified as low, medium, or high.

COVID-19 Community Levels – Use the Highest Level that Applies to Your Community

New COVID-19 Cases Per 100,000 people in the past 7 days	Indicators	Low	Medium	High
		Fewer than 200	New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	<10.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	<10.0%	10.0-14.9 %	≥15.0%
200 or more	New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	NA	<10.0	≥10.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	NA	<10.0%	≥10.0%

The COVID-19 community level is determined by the higher of the new admissions and inpatient beds metrics, based on the current level of new cases per 100,000 population in the past 7 days

To find out the COVID-19 community level:

- First determine whether a county, state, or territory has fewer than 200 new cases per 100,000 people in the past 7 days or 200 new cases or more per 100,000 people in the past 7 days.
- Then, determine the level (low, medium, or high) for the new admissions and inpatient beds and indicators using the scale for the area's number for new cases.
- The COVID-19 Community Level is based on the higher of the new admissions and inpatient beds metrics.
- Check your county's [COVID-19 Community Level](#).

Regardless of the level of community transmission, MSB uses multi-layered mitigation strategies. The five key mitigation strategies we use are essential to safe delivery of in-person instruction:

- Universal and correct use of [masks](#)
- [Physical distancing](#)
- [Handwashing and respiratory etiquette](#)
- [Cleaning](#) and maintaining healthy facilities
- [Contact tracing](#), when needed, in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the health department

COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing

Vaccination is highly encouraged for all students. Vaccination is required, per policy, for all staff with reasonable accommodations for those with approved medical or religious accommodation requests. Staff with an approved request for accommodation will be required to submit a weekly COVID-19 screening test .

Though masking and social distancing may be required, many MSB students are unable to do so.

MSB's complete Vaccination Policy can be found on [MSB's website](#).

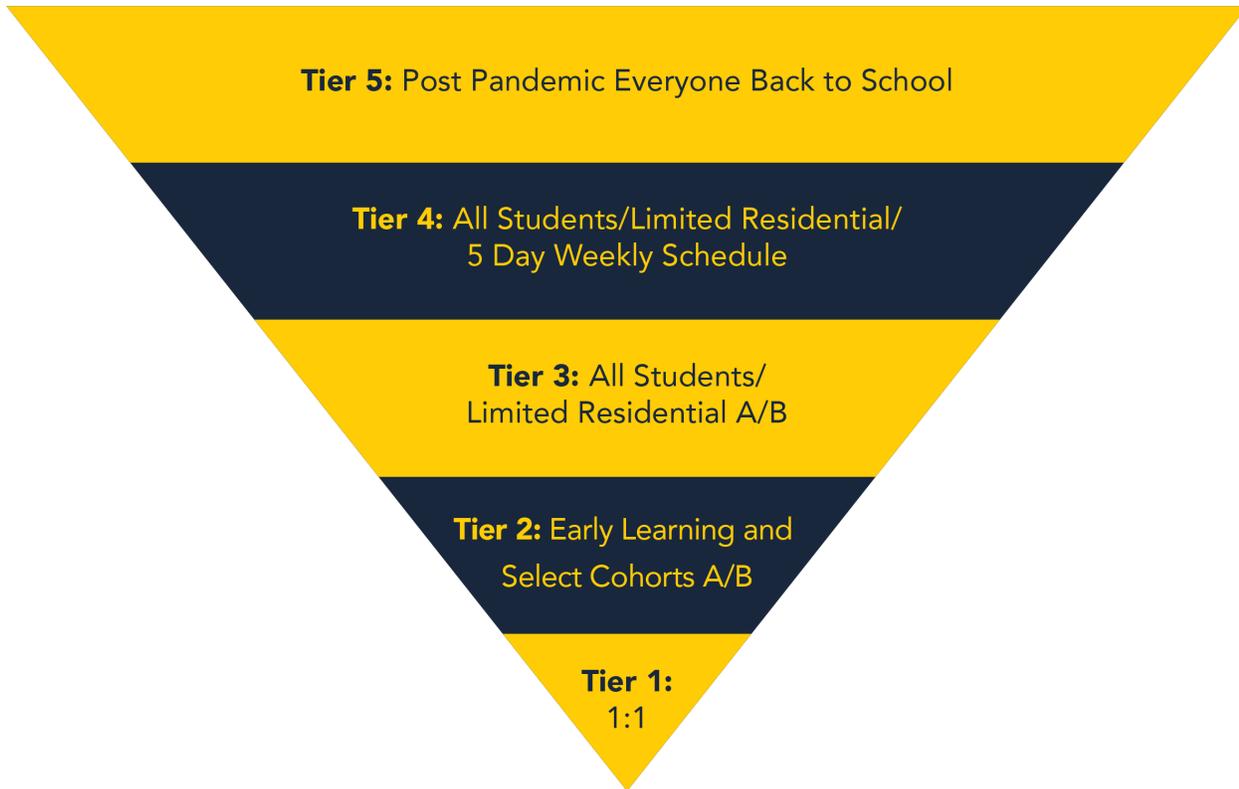
MSB has a uniquely vulnerable student population whose special needs make it difficult to fully implement the strategies that reduce the risk for transmission compared to other students. For example, many students are unable to wear masks safely or have the ability to manage their sneezes or coughing effectively. Many cannot report when they are not feeling well. Many students at MSB have complex medical profiles which put them at greater risk for severe complications.

Many students require close and frequent physical contact for things such as positioning and physical management (such as for students with physical disabilities). Deafblind students require tactile sign language, a very intimate form of communication in which language is transmitted directly through physical touch from the staff's hands to the student's. And many students cannot maintain appropriate physical distancing for a variety of reasons.

These factors make it challenging to protect students and staff from spreading the virus to one another.

Therefore, the protocols will be different, by necessity, with a higher degree of precaution and protective equipment (medical masks) when compared to most public schools.

Our first goal is to have students safely in school for instruction.



MSB's Tiered Reopening Plan

The Tiers Explained

Tier 1: Individual In-Person Student Appointments

- MSB staff initiated appointments with students (accompanied by a caregiver) for in-person services such as low vision assessments, educational, related service assessments, clinical, or instructional support needs which are not suited for virtual delivery.

Tier 2: Early Learning Students and Limited Student Cohorts with A/B Schedules

- Preschool and kindergarten cohorts begin on-campus instruction on an alternating A/B schedule.
- In grades 1-12, introduction of small classroom cohorts of select students will begin on-campus instruction on an alternating A/B schedule.
- Initial student groups may or may not include residential services.
- Not all students will return in Tier 2.

Tier 3: All Students with A/B Schedules and Limited Residential Program

- All students return to the MSB campus on an alternating A/B weekly or daily schedule in cohorts as much as possible.

- Residential program will be limited to students who live outside of a defined geographic radius of 30 miles from MSB campus in order to limit numbers of students/staff to safe levels.

Tier 4: All Students Return to Five-Day Weekly Schedules with Limited Residential Program

- Students return to a five-day weekly schedule in cohorts as much as possible.
- Residential program remains limited to students who live outside of a defined geographic radius to maintain safe numbers. (The same as Tier 3.)
- This Tier is the final stage until the end of the pandemic or infection rates are extremely controlled within the state of Maryland.

Tier 5: Everyone Back to School

- Residential students residing within 30 miles of the school return to pre-pandemic residential schedules.

PUBLIC SAFETY ↑



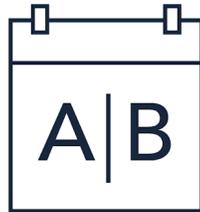
Tier 5

Everyone back to school!



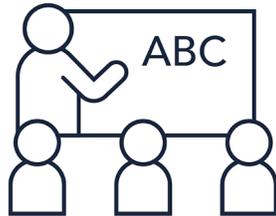
Tier 4

All students return to five-day weekly schedules with limited residential program.



Tier 3

All students with A/B schedules and limited residential program.



Tier 2

Early learning students and limited student cohorts with A/B schedules.



Tier 1

Individual in-person student appointments.

↓ PUBLIC SAFETY

Assumptions

1. Each tier assumes an increased level of public safety based on improved infection rates and guidance from the scientific community, but no relaxation of mitigation protocols.
2. With successful implementation of each tier, MSB will transition to the next tier.
3. If circumstances improve dramatically, MSB could skip tiers, such as if infection rates decrease significantly, access to screening testing and/or as vaccination rates improve. (rev. February 2021)
4. If circumstances worsen, MSB could revert to an earlier tier with decreased numbers of students on campus, or to virtual instruction.

Educational Recovery Plan

Athletics

MSB students compete in interscholastic athletics as part of the Eastern Athletic Association for the Blind (EAAB). MSB competes during four sports seasons throughout the year against other schools for the blind in the EAAB. Student athletes will be required to wear masks, if able, while **not** actively participating on the field of play.

Protocols and Procedures

Symptom Monitoring

Staff and parents are not required to complete a daily symptom screening, but are required to not report to work and to keep students home if they display any Covid-like symptoms.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing means keeping space, a minimum of 6 feet, between yourself and other people outside of your home. Limiting close face-to-face contact with others is the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection.

- COVID-19 spreads easily among people who are in close contact.
- Spread happens when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or talks and droplets are launched into the air and land in the mouth, noses or eyes of others nearby or if these droplets can also be inhaled into the lungs.

Practice physical distancing

- Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arm's length) from other people when possible
- When large group gatherings are necessary, masks must be worn and every effort made to maintain distance from one another. Depending on the size of the group, this may not be possible.
- Arrange student furniture to promote the 3-6 feet safe physical distancing as much as possible.

Masks and Face Coverings

PPE and masking strategies specific to working with students are still in effect. The CDC advises that schools with students at risk for getting very sick with COVID-19 must make reasonable modifications when necessary to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, are able to access in-person learning. Schools might need to require masking, based on federal, state, or

local laws and policies, to ensure that students with conditions that increase their risk for getting very sick with COVID-19 can access in-person learning. For more information, visit the [U.S. Dept. of Education Disability Rights](#) webpage.

Student Services Staff:

- N95s are to be worn with students who do not mask and whose needs require staff to be within 6 feet of them.
- When a staff member is working with a student that cannot mask and the staff is unable to wear an N95, they must wear a face shield and two procedural masks.
- Procedural masks are to be worn with students who wear masks and whose needs require staff to be within 6 feet of them.
- Masks are not required outdoors unless assisting a student who is unable to mask

The school will **continue to require everyone on campus to wear masks when within 6 feet of a student.**

- All staff must wear masks when within 6 feet of a student regardless of vaccination status.
- Every adult visiting MSB buildings is required to wear a surgical/procedural mask when within 6 feet of students.
- Anyone entering a Health Center area and the Blanton Health Center entrance must wear a surgical/procedural mask.

Persons Who Have Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 (Isolation)

Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 or have suspected COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should complete isolation as follows:

- Stay home for at least 5 full days from the date of symptom onset if symptomatic or from the date of the positive test if no symptoms.
 - Day 0 is considered the day symptoms started in symptomatic persons or the day of the positive test (based on the date of testing) if asymptomatic.
- After day 5, if the person has no symptoms or if symptoms are improved and they have had no fever for at least 24 hours without medication, they may return to school or child care if they wear a well-fitting mask* for 5 additional days (day 6 through day 10).
 - If they are unable to wear a mask, they may return to school or child care if they have a negative test at day 5 or later; otherwise, they should remain at home for day 6 through day 10. A negative test at day 10 or after is not needed to return.

Persons Who May be Close Contacts to Someone with COVID-19 (Quarantine)

Staff and students/children who may be close contacts, regardless of their vaccination status, can continue to attend school and child care as long as they remain asymptomatic.

- Those who can wear a mask should do so for 10 days (day 0 is the last date of exposure).
- A test at 3-5 days after exposure is recommended, especially for those who cannot wear a mask (ex. children under 2 years of age).

MSB follows guidance from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) regarding response to confirmed cases in schools. Please refer to [Maryland's Guidance for Schools](#) for more information.

Outdoor Activities

Outdoor activities are encouraged including educational and therapeutic activities. Aside from the health benefits of sunshine, fresh air, and exercise, outdoor activities tend to be safer since there is a lower risk of transmitting viruses.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

High Touch Surfaces

High touch surfaces such as desktops, doorknobs, railings, and restrooms will be cleaned throughout the day. All staff will assist with sanitizing high touch surfaces within the classrooms and residences throughout the day.

Electrostatic Misting

MSB housekeeping and other staff will help disinfect high touch surfaces using an electrostatic misting system.* This utilizes electrostatic spray technology to allow disinfecting solutions to reach surfaces outside the line of sight, covering what conventional trigger sprays may miss, including the sides, underside and backside of surfaces. It works by using an electrode to introduce an attractive charge to the disinfecting or sanitizing product and atomizes the solution, using an air compressor to generate a quiet, but powerful liquid flow at 9,000 sq feet per gallon.

This cleaner is EPA-registered to kill 19 illness-causing organisms in two minutes or less. The ready-to-use, one-step disinfectant cleaner eliminates odors and kills outbreak-causing viruses like influenza, rhinovirus and norovirus and bacteria like *Staphylococcus aureus*, MRSA and Vancomycin Resistant *Enterococcus faecium* (VRE). The non-bleach-based formula is specifically designed for broad surface compatibility, making it ideal for use on a wide variety of surfaces found in schools, athletic facilities, offices and more.

*Electrostatic misting will not be used in Early Learning due to Office of Child Care Regulations.

HVAC Systems and Air Quality

Knowing that stagnant air is a significant risk factor in the transmission of COVID-19, it is important to address HVAC systems on campus. With consultation of HVAC and industrial hygiene experts, MSB is in the fortunate position of having new buildings with modern HVAC systems. MSB's HVAC systems run 24/7 providing a constant flow of air and increasing outdoor air ventilation. The system supplies 6-8 air changes per hour in classrooms, up to 10 air changes per hour in offices. Inside air is replaced with outside air approximately 2 air changes per hour. These air change rates are at the levels recommended for hospital rooms, including those with COVID-19 patients. HVAC systems have been upgraded with MERV-13 filters where applicable.

Local School System Transportation

Since MSB depends on the local education agencies (LEA) to provide transportation, as part of each student's IEP, student transportation on buses will be subject to the regulations and protocols of each student's LEA.

Parents & Visitors

All parents and visitors entering student areas of the school are required to wear a cloth or medical/procedural mask.

Contact Information

For questions or more information, please contact:

Patti Bell, Health Center Manager: 410-444-5000 x1555

Bill McCubbin, Director of Campus Operations: 410-444-5000 x 1375

Lauren Pappas, Director of Human Resources: 410-444-5000 x1469

Kim Poswiatowski, Benefits Specialist: 410-444-5000 x1364

Robert Hair, Superintendent: 410-444-5000 x1710

Research on COVID-19 is evolving on a daily basis and recommendations will change. Changes to this plan will be added as addendums at the end of this document.