School Reentry Considerations

**In-School Instruction With Physical Distancing**

[Recess](https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/strategies_for_recess_in_schools.aspx) should not be eliminated if schools are operating under a model of in-school instruction with physical distancing. Recess helps students achieve the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day for children and adolescents, which can improve strength and endurance, enhance academic achievement, and increase self-esteem. Recess also helps students practice social skills such as cooperation, following rules, problem-solving, negotiation, sharing, and communication. Opportunities for free play, to engage in physical activity, and to practice social skills are especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below are considerations for recess.

Provide recess or free time to engage in safe physical activity daily for [all K-12 students](https://www.shapeamerica.org/advocacy/upload/Guide-for-Recess-Policy.pdf) whenever possible. Recess should provide opportunities for all students to be active and allow for free choice by students.

Do not withhold recess as punishment for a student.

Evaluate available indoor and outdoor spaces on school property that can be used for recess. Identify multiple areas where recess can be held for different cohorts of students to minimize crowding. Whenever possible, use outdoor spaces for recess.

If using indoor spaces for recess, keep the doors and windows open to maximize circulation and air flow to accommodate for increased respiration by students while participating in physical activity. Consult with the school-wide COVID-19 response team to ensure the ventilation system is working properly and to ensure opening doors and windows is safe for students and staff.

The school-wide COVID-19 response team should develop a plan for transporting students from the classroom to the designated recess area. Give students guidance on how to safely transition between areas while still maintaining physical distancing. Plan time to practice these transitions with students.

Provide adequate adult supervision for recess. Ensure recess supervisors are trained in strategies to assist students in maintaining physical distancing and student conflict resolution, especially considering the impact of potential student trauma caused by COVID-19.

Have students and staff wash or sanitize hands before and after recess. Use CDC downloadable resources on [handwashing](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html) as visual cues and reminders.

Significantly limit or eliminate the use of playground equipment or play structures. If playground equipment must be used, it requires normal, routine cleaning. Targeted disinfection may be appropriate for high-touch surfaces like railings. Consult with the school-wide COVID-19 response team and [CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html) on playground and recess play equipment sanitation procedures.

Use painted play spaces or create play areas with stencils or cones to designate zones to help students identify how to safely comply with physical distancing guidelines and to provide sufficient opportunities for free choice during recess.

Encourage recess games and activities that do not require physical contact or for students to be in close physical proximity with each other.

Limit the use of recess play equipment (e.g., balls, frisbees) and eliminate the use of equipment that would be passed between or shared by multiple students.

If using play equipment, keep extra materials available in case a piece of equipment becomes dirty or unsanitary during an activity.

Play equipment that will be touched or handled by students should be cleaned with soap and water and then disinfected with an [EPA-approved disinfectant](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19) that is effective against COVID-19 and is safe for that piece of equipment (check manufacturer recommendations). Disinfectants should only be used on materials that students are not likely to put in their mouths.

Suggested citation: SHAPE America. (2020). School reentry considerations: K-12 physical education, health education, and physical activity. Reston, VA: Author.

The recommendations and strategies provided herein are obtained based on guidance for schools provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and national recommendations for physical education, health education, recess, and classroom-based physical activity. The COVID-19 outbreak is an ongoing, rapidly developing situation. Educators are encouraged to monitor publicly available information and to always follow federal, state and local health organization guidance and government mandates. This information may vary and will be updated as necessary.