

COVID Safe Guidance for Recess

Recess and play is an important part of elementary school. The following guidance is provided to schools to inform their planning.

Outdoor play area use will be permitted. Schools are responsible for ensuring students perform hand hygiene before and after use and maintain 6' distancing. Schools will need to be able to limit group sizes on playground equipment and have enough supervision to be able to maintain distancing at all times.

RECESS PROCEDURES

- Students may play together and on playground equipment.
- Playground hard space does not need to be taped off.
- Cones and other demarcation aides should be used to create stations or play areas that encourage reduced numbers in common play areas. Schools are encouraged to use a station approach to have a variety of designated play areas for students to use.
- Schools may want to consider a rotating schedule to outdoor recess in order to avoid large numbers of students competing for the same play space and making physical distancing difficult. For example, a grade level may be assigned to outdoor recess on certain days of the week and indoor or gym play time on other days to reduce the load on outdoor only play areas.
- Face coverings should be worn properly at all times by students and staff. Consider stocking spare masks so students can replace face coverings that become wet, dirty, or damaged during play. Only masks with earloops should be worn when playing on playground equipment. Gaiters, bandanas, masks with head ties or head straps, and masks with earloops equipped with 'ear saver' straps or ties that wrap around the back of the head should not be worn because they can create a strangulation hazard if they get caught on the equipment.
- Handwashing before and after recess is essential and required. Playground equipment cleaning with basic cleaning supplies (like soapy products, water) is generally sufficient. If there is suspected contact involving an infected person, targeted disinfection can be performed on high-touch components like grabs bars and rings and railings. A challenge with disinfection is that there is a possibility for slippery residue, which creates safety hazards, and component damage from regular exposure to disinfectant products (especially for ropes and bolts). Spillage of disinfectant on the wood chips, which some students put in their mouths, is also a concern.
- At this time, shared items (like balls) should not be used. Once approved, these type of items will need to be cleaned/disinfected between use and staff must ensure that they are used individually. Disinfection involves MCPS-approved cleaning/disinfecting products or isolating the items for 3-4 days between handling.
- Hand sanitizer may be used when hands are not visibly dirty, greasy, or sticky. Consider bringing hand sanitizer to recess so it is readily available.
- Staff are encouraged to develop a hand signal to alert students when they are too physically close to peers. Staff are not expected to use yard sticks or tape off play space, rather use judgment and best guidance to support safe and appropriate play. Students who demonstrate challenges with physical distancing should be approached through a teachable moment approach and non-disciplinary, unless it appears to be willful disobedience of understood expectations.
- Consider the use of portable megaphones or other auditory alert sounds in lieu of whistles for attention signals.