



Risk Determination for Wrangell Public Schools

Many of you want to know about how the risk of the school community is determined. There is some ambiguity on what factors into the decision making.

General Information provided by the Department of Education and Early Development - DEED

Low, medium, and high-risk operational zones are determined by each school district. School districts have the authority to close district facilities and transition part of a school or an entire school to remote learning. When making that determination, schools should collaborate with local and state public health officials and their medical advisory team, who can help advise them on closure decisions.

The average daily per capita incidence is useful to reflect the amount of COVID-19 transmission that is occurring in a community; however, no one measure can fully capture the complex dynamics of the epidemic in Alaska. Averaging the per capita incidence of COVID-19 over 14 days reduces the influence of day-to-day fluctuations in the number of cases identified in a region. Therefore, ***DHSS strongly encourages focusing on trends and patterns over time, rather than the number of cases on any given day.*** Districts and schools should note that the 14-day case average is most useful for decisions on decreasing risk levels, while the 7-day case average will be a timely indicator of rising community transmission and may help inform decisions to increase levels.

DHSS highly recommends that every school district have a working group that helps to guide the districts in its phases and plans throughout the year. This working group should include local medical professionals and may include public health nurses where applicable who will have greater insight into the local transmission.

DEED and DHSS encourage districts to look at the “community” risk as the larger community in which students, teachers, and parents live and work. This may be a portion of a district or it may involve the transmission risk in another district if people regularly commute and work between different districts.

Decisions about whether to open or close a school cannot be made solely on epidemiological grounds. These decisions inherently entail complex tradeoffs and judgements about a community’s unique vulnerability to COVID-19.

Schools also play an important role in parents and caregivers' ability to work and plan, especially for younger children. We highly recommend minimizing and messaging changes to in-person learning as often as possible as long as it is safe for children, staff, and communities. All of these factors may need to be considered when making such decisions. Nor should schools be thought of as 'open' or 'closed'.

Specific Factors Used to determine Wrangell Public Schools Risk Level

Specifically, consideration for our district is the ability to staff properly. In addition to the usual staff that is needed for "no risk" level, additional staff is needed to mitigate low and medium risk levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, we are not fully staffed at all three schools. Our sub pool is minimal at best. If a staff member goes into isolation or quarantine, then we increase the risk tremendously.

1. Community data: The Community Risk Assessment (tool) presented each Monday by the EOC
2. Staff available for school safety & delivery of classroom education
3. Proper sanitation product availability and procedures implemented
4. Appropriate usage of PPE from students and staff with mandated masks, hygiene, and distancing mandates.
5. Ability to properly isolate symptomatic students and staff
6. Ability to contact trace in a timely manner