

Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

Safe Start to School Guide **3.0**



Revised September 7, 2021
(updates in red)

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SUPERINTENDENT – SEPTEMBER 7, 2021

Dear Families,

The last thing I was hoping to say in one of my first letters to you is the word COVID-19. We are one year and six months into this pandemic with no end in sight. We do, however, know more about the behavior of the virus and the best strategies to mitigate spread.

I would like to encourage you and your family to consider vaccination. Yes, you can still get COVID-19 after vaccination, but the data is very clear that the prevalence of hospitalization and death are very low. The most prevalent age groups who are becoming infected are the unvaccinated under 50 years old. The Delta variant is highly contagious, and experts believe the risk for super-spreader events when school begins is very high. Only 25% of children have been infected so far, and experts believe they are vulnerable to this variant. I do ask that you submit a copy of your child's vaccination card (if applicable) with your registration packet to help us with contact tracing if needed.

Masks, social distancing, and symptom monitoring have been highly effective in reducing the spread of the virus. All staff and students must always wear masks while indoors. The Delta variant of the virus is causing symptoms other than fever first, and then fever may follow afterward. If your child is sick, with or without fever, please keep them home and have them tested as soon as possible.

We will continue to disinfect throughout the day with special emphasis on high-contact surfaces such as doorknobs, stair rails, desks, and tables. Hand sanitizer will continue to be available in all classrooms and at each building entrance. The evening custodial staff will fumigate all rooms and surfaces in each building nightly.

Finally, all students will begin school in-person with no virtual options. We believe students learn best when they are in the physical presence of their teacher and classmates. If a staff member or student tests positive for COVID-19, contact tracing will begin immediately, and all protocols within this manual will be followed. Virtual teaching/learning will be assigned on a case-by-case basis as needed. MSDB also now has the capability to test unvaccinated staff and students who have no symptoms once per week **on Thursdays** as an extra layer of precaution.

I am honored to serve as the Superintendent of Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB), and my number one priority will always be the health and safety of students and staff. I still believe the worst of COVID-19 is behind us, but the data is very clear that we are not yet out of the woods. The good news is, we have much experience and a great track record in keeping our exposure numbers low, and I am confident we will continue to do so. If modifications in our Safe Start to School Guide are needed, we will notify you via email, social media, and by all other possible means of communication. I am optimistic we will once again rise to meet the challenges of COVID-19 this school year, while ensuring your child receives the best educational experience we have to offer. Thank you for trusting us and partnering with us in this endeavor!

Sincerely,



Jeremy Stinson, Ph.D.
MSDB Superintendent
jeremy.stinson@msdbk12.org (601) 984-8203

GENERAL INFORMATION

Our district is the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) with two distinct schools. The Mississippi School for the Deaf serves children from age 3-21 who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. The Mississippi School for the Blind serves children from age 3-21 who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. Our agency also includes statewide services which encompass our birth to three SKI*HI program and other services that are in development, the Mississippi Assistance Center (MAC) which provides appropriate sensory-specific assessments and recommendations to families and districts and facilitates the admissions process to both schools, and the Mississippi Instructional Resource Center (MIRC) which provides access to textbooks and instructional materials to districts serving students with visual impairments.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

In-Person Learning

All MSDB students will continue with in-person learning. Due to the increasing COVID-19 numbers, we ask that parents and other visitors not come to campus, except for athletic events and urgent matters pre-approved by the principal or superintendent. Although the MDE has approved the use of hybrid learning, MSDB does not currently have a need due to our smaller population and ability to social distance at all times.

Remember, if your student requires medications during the school day and rides a bus, be sure to give it to the bus chaperone and they will bring it to the nurse. Students will attend classes on campus Monday-Friday with departure at 1:40 p.m. on Fridays. There are a few exceptions to accommodate for holidays. Please refer to the 2021-2022 school calendar on page three (3) of this plan.

Virtual Option Due to Exposure or Outbreaks

Though our goal is to remain on campus the entire year, there may be times when an individual student, small group, or class requires a quarantine. You will receive a notification from the school explaining that your child needs to be quarantined due to exposure to a positive COVID-19 case. There may also be times when our adult supervision coverage is inadequate to meet student needs. We diligently hope the need for temporary closure or quarantine is not needed.

If the virtual option is needed, students will receive live, virtual instruction from a certified teacher, and a classroom assistant may help virtual students through tutoring sessions. This option must include 330 minutes per day of virtual instruction through the Learning Management System (LMS) called Canvas, which is the equivalent of a full day of in-person learning.

Technology

We achieved our goal last year of providing one-to-one, age-appropriate devices to use in the classroom and at home as needed. Internet hotspots will also be offered if available to families who need them if the hotspot will work as an option for Internet access from home. Parents and students

will be required to sign the MSDB Acceptable Use Policy before being issued any device. Students and parents will continue to receive training as needed on proper device usage and the online Learning Management System (LMS) called Canvas. Families who still have no wifi access after all attempts to remedy the issue will be provided learning packets, which include the same assignments that would be given in virtual instruction.

Attendance

Whether in person or virtual, attendance will be documented as present or absent according to past practices. If virtual, the student must sign in to Canvas and be present to be counted as such. If students use learning packets due to lack of wi-fi or have temporary wi-fi issues, each school will make one-on-one contact with a student for the day to authenticate their presence and provide daily evidence of engagement. Students must attend class for a minimum of 330 minutes of instruction per day. After five (5) unexcused absences, an attendance officer will be notified.

OPERATIONS

Transportation

Day Students:

We are working with each District that transports students from home to campus daily. Please check with your local district for their cleaning and sanitizing protocols. Please remember if your child is not riding the bus due to illness, emergency, or times of campus closure, it is your responsibility to contact your district's transportation department and let them know.

Residential Students:

- MSDB buses will be sanitized before and after each transportation trip.
- All drivers and passengers will be required to always wear masks.
- Whenever possible, windows may be lowered to encourage air flow.
- Whenever possible, social distancing requirements will be followed.

Food Services

Meals will be provided for students and staff in "to-go" boxes if necessary for strict social distancing. Four separate areas are available to support efforts to social distance during lunch: the cafeteria, student center, bistro, and recreational building. Pick-up times will be staggered to allow for better social distancing if necessary.

HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Masks

- Masks must always be worn indoors. Even vaccinated individuals can carry and/or contract the Delta variant of the virus.
- Masks are not required outside if social distancing.

Temperature Checks

Day Students:

1. All students' temperatures will be checked as they unload from the bus. Any student with a fever of 100.4 or higher will be taken to the Health Clinic for follow-up.
2. Some districts are performing temperature checks before students board the bus. Please check with your local district to see what your district is doing.

Residential Students:

MSDB chaperone staff will check each residential student's temperature before boarding the bus on Sundays. Any child who has 100.4 or higher will return home with parents.

All Students:

All students' temperatures will be taken during lunch. Any student who has 100.4 or higher or any other symptoms will be taken or sent to the Health Clinic for follow-up.

Staff:

Staff will be self-monitoring their health symptoms and not reporting to work if sick and/or fever. They will also self-check temperature upon entering the building each day.

Sanitation & Safety Protocols:

1. Hand sanitizer stations are located in the office, cafeteria, dorms, gymnasiums, auditoriums, health center, and all classrooms.
2. Restrooms are continuously stocked with soap, and disinfectant spray is being utilized daily for all door knobs, light fixtures, keyboards, and desks.
3. Students and staff should use hand sanitizer when entering and leaving any building. Handwashing with soap for 20 seconds or longer is required before leaving the restroom.
4. Safety procedures related to visitors will be enhanced by limiting which, if any, exterior doors are unlocked.
5. Desks and materials will be wiped down with disinfectants after any in-class transition or sharing of materials.
6. Each student will have a 1:1 device for use on campus to avoid cross-contamination.
7. Classroom doors will be open for increased air flow and ventilation. Safety procedures related to visitors will be enhanced by limiting which, if any, exterior doors are unlocked.
8. Every attempt will be made to have a substitute teacher in the classroom if a teacher becomes ill. Combining classes will be a last resort, and the combined class will follow social distancing guidelines. This may mean moving the classes to a larger space in the building.
9. Restrooms are cleaned and sanitized thoroughly each night by the custodial staff.
10. Restroom handles, doorknobs, and faucets in Buildings A, B, and C will be sanitized at mid-day each day by custodial staff.
11. The DHH Elementary Annex will sanitize their own bathrooms during the day as needed.
12. Signs in Buildings A, B, and C will clearly indicate if bathrooms are for staff or for students.
13. Residence hall students will have their own bedrooms and bathrooms if possible.
14. Residence hall bedrooms and bathrooms will be cleaned each day by the student according to current practice.
15. Masks will be worn in public areas in the residence halls. When students are alone in their bedrooms, doors must be open and masks are optional.
16. Residence hall door knobs and light switches will be wiped down and sanitized by residential staff before departing for the day.

17. Students and staff will use hand sanitizer upon entering and leaving the residence halls.
18. Residence halls will be cleaned thoroughly on Fridays after students leave.

When Someone is POSITIVE OR SYMPTOMATIC for COVID-19 at MSDB (Vaccinated or Unvaccinated):

1. If an MSDB staff member/student tests positive for COVID-19, then he or she MSDB must stay at home in isolation for 10 days after onset of symptoms and be fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication. The staff member/student must have improved symptoms after the 10-day isolation period to be able to return to school **and must bring a copy of the initial positive test result for the principal or supervisor to keep on file.**
2. If an individual has no symptoms but tests positive with a rapid test and tests negative within 48 hrs with the molecular-based test, the individual may return to school and monitor symptoms.
3. If a student is sick on campus with COVID-19 symptoms (such as fever of **100.4** or higher, cough, or shortness of breath), he or she must report to the Health Clinic for isolation and evaluation. Parents will be notified to pick up the student and take them for a COVID-19 test. Symptomatic staff members must go off campus for testing immediately. **Free COVID testing sites and appointment scheduling can be found at covidschedule.umc.edu or by calling (601) 496-7200. If the initial test is negative, documentation must be provided to the principal or supervisor for the staff member/student to return to school.**

When Someone has CLOSE CONTACT with a COVID-POSITIVE INDIVIDUAL:

1. Administration will begin contact tracing to determine who may have come into close contact with the positive individual (less than 6 feet, at least 15 minutes combined).
2. Staff/students who have no symptoms and have been in close contact with someone testing positive for COVID-19, have two (2) options based on vaccination status:
 - a. If a person is vaccinated and has no symptoms, he or she can remain at school, monitor symptoms, and **MUST** be tested within 3-5 days of exposure to rule out infection.
 - b. If a person is unvaccinated and has no symptoms, he or she must be quarantined for 7 days and can return on day 8 if he or she tests negative on day 5, 6, or 7 **and continues to have no symptoms. Results from over-the-counter home testing kits will not be accepted.** Quarantine begins after the last potential exposure to a COVID-positive individual. Example: If one is living in the same household with a COVID-positive individual and unable to separate/isolate from that individual, quarantine will begin when the COVID-positive individual's isolation period ends. If the person is able to separate/isolate, quarantine begins after last exposure to the COVID-positive individual.
 - c. Regardless of vaccination status, the staff member/student does not have to quarantine if they have had Covid within the past 3 months as long as they have no symptoms.
3. All areas visited by a symptomatic, COVID-positive person will be sanitized and remain vacant for at least 24 hours.
4. Administrators may have to temporarily close classrooms, hallways, schools, or campus for cleaning.
5. Staff members who are required to isolate due to exposure or a positive test will consult with their supervisor, who will then consult with the superintendent regarding use of leave or working remotely.
6. Unvaccinated staff and students who have no symptoms are encouraged to take advantage of on-campus, rapid testing once per week **on Thursdays. If positive, the staff member/student will immediately be given the molecular test and MUST quarantine. If the molecular test is**

negative, the staff member or student may return to school immediately. Students must have a parent consent form signed before testing can begin. Staff are highly encouraged to take part in COVID testing on Thursdays.

7. If a staff member or student is exposed to a COVID-positive individual, he or she must test within 3-5 days after exposure. Staff and students must provide documentation of test results anytime a test is taken off-site.
8. Staff and students are highly encouraged to provide the principal or supervisor with a copy of his or her vaccination card, if applicable.
9. An outbreak is defined as ≥ 3 cases of COVID-19 in a classroom or group of 30 or less (sports team, group activity, band, or other) or 10% or more of larger groups infected over a 14-day period. In an outbreak setting, quarantine and exclusion from the school setting will take place for all unvaccinated, exposed persons in the outbreak group.
10. MSDB will consider dismissal of the entire campus under the following conditions.
 - If ≥ 3 individual classroom settings, defined groups, or defined buildings are experiencing simultaneous outbreaks, or
 - If multiple absences or exclusions of students and staff are leading to disruptions in on-campus functioning and impacting the learning environment as determined by the schools.
 - If dismissal of the campus is warranted,
 - All extracurricular activities will be canceled according to MHSAA guidelines.
 - The dismissal time frame will be 10 days from the date the last COVID-19 case was at the school during the infectious period.

Mississippi Department of Health (MSDH) Alert: All persons, including fully vaccinated individuals, infected with COVID-19 must remain in the home or other appropriate residential location for 10 days from onset of illness. The failure or refusal to obey the lawful order of a health officer is, at a minimum, a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of \$500 or imprisonment for six months or both.

Sports and Events

MSDB will follow state, county, and city ordinances related to groups of people gathering but reserves the right to create policy above and beyond the ordinance requirements.

COMMUNICATIONS

Primary Health and Safety District Contacts

Dr. Jeremy Stinson, Superintendent
jeremy.stinson@msdbk12.org
(601) 984-8203

Dupe Oluwatade, Health Clinic Supervisor
modupeola.oluwatade@msdbk12.org
(601) 984-8121

Information and Updates

Follow our Facebook pages:

MSD: <https://www.facebook.com/MississippiSchoolForTheDeaf/>

MSB: <https://www.facebook.com/mississippischoolfortheblind/>

Check our websites often:

MSDB: <http://www.msdbk12.org> (coming October 2021)

MSD: <http://www.msd.k12.ms.us>

MSB: <http://www.msb.k12.ms.us>