

# School Health Screenings

GUIDANCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

November 2020



Student screenings are essential to the early detection of health problems and provide schools with the opportunity to address barriers for student learning. Given the recent COVID-19 pandemic, schools may need to consider modifications to routine health screening procedures. Thoughtful planning and thorough implementation of known COVID-19 mitigation practices can help limit the risk of virus spread when conducting mandatory student screenings. The following guidance document is intended to provide general suggestions and considerations for schools when conducting onsite health screenings. This guidance is not to be considered a replacement for local or clinical judgement in decision-making as each site must determine an appropriate plan based on the unique needs and resources of their local school community.

## Current Student Screening Requirements in Schools

Regardless of school reentry model (full reentry, hybrid, remote, etc.) students shall continue to receive all appropriate screenings which they are entitled to by state law. In New Mexico, vision, hearing, dental, developmental and well-child screenings may be required depending on student need, age, and/or grade level. [New Mexico Administrative Code \(NMAC\) 7.30.11](#) requires vision screenings be administered to all pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, and third grade students as well as all new and transfer students without a record of vision screening on file. Per the rule, screening must include distance visual acuity, ocular alignment, and color vision. Please note, ocular alignment and color vision testing are required only once in any one of the targeted grades.

Vision and hearing screenings must also be completed as part of the pre-referral documentation for an evaluation for special education and related services. The Student Assistance Team (SAT), and ultimately the Eligibility Determination Team (EDT), must consider and address any screening findings when developing interventions and accommodations for the student. For additional information regarding vision and hearing screening in relation to the special education referral process, please see the [New Mexico Technical Evaluation and Assessment Manual \(NMTEAM\)](#).

In addition to vision and hearing screening requirements, early childhood programs also require a dental, developmental, and well-child screening be completed. Dental and well-child screenings are to be completed by a school healthcare professional or private provider within the child's first three months of attendance. The developmental screening is to be conducted by the teacher or Child Find personnel within three months of attendance as well. More information regarding health promotion and developmental screening requirements can be found in the [FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality for Public School Preschool Programs](#) document.



Reentry Support Guidance

Public Education Department

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[ped.state.nm.us](http://ped.state.nm.us)

## General Safety Considerations for Screenings at School:

- Consider prioritizing initial screenings for students who:
  - ▶ Have never been screened or who have not had a screening within the past year;
  - ▶ Demonstrate an obvious need or apparent deficit in any area of screening (e.g. vision, hearing, dental, developmental, wellness); or
  - ▶ Are engaged in the SAT process and require vision and hearing screenings as part of the special education eligibility determination process.
- Consider delaying screenings, as allowable by law, until it is safer to do so based on community spread of the virus and other relevant factors.
- Rather than conducting mass screening events (e.g. an entire grade level or multiple grade levels at the same time), consider limiting screening to smaller groups and maintain cohorts.



ensure the lighting is adequate and to verify if vision screening devices will function properly outdoors.

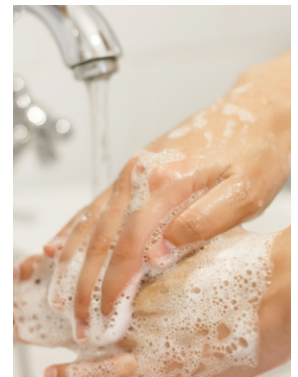
- Determine if the location allows for separate entrance and exit doors. If so, label doors clearly to ensure one-way foot traffic.
- If screening one student at a time, consider setting up the screening location in a hallway outside of a classroom and calling students individually to avoid congregation.
- Provide visual cues (for example, labels on the floor or signs on the wall) for students waiting in line to help ensure appropriate social distancing of six feet or greater.
- Provide visual cues for maintaining a minimum of 6 feet between the screener and the child, whenever possible, and any accompanying adults.
- Ensure adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is available to safely conduct screenings in the event the screener will need to be in close contact with the student.
- Identify and implement a system to ensure adequate records are maintained during screenings in the event contact tracing is required as a result of a lab-confirmed positive case.
- Consider conducting a trial run prior to the actual screening event to evaluate timing, traffic flow, access to supplies, etc.
- Every effort should be made to ensure the screening location selected is near sinks and running water for handwashing and/or that hand sanitizer is available and can be safely used by the student population being screened.

## Planning for Student Screenings at School

- If screening multiple students at one time, consider moving the screening location to a large, open, well-ventilated space such as gymnasium or multi-purpose room that would allow for appropriate social distancing of six feet or greater when students are waiting in line. If such a space is not available, and it is safe to do so, consider leaving doors or windows open in the available space to increase air circulation.
- If appropriate, consider conducting screenings outdoors. Air quality and weather conditions must be assessed prior to planning outdoor screening events to ensure staff and student safety. Also consider noise level to determine if space will allow for effective screening and communication during screening. Special considerations should also be made for vision screenings which must be conducted out of direct sunlight. According to the [National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health FAQ \(August 2020\)](#), use of a tent or conducting screening under an outdoor covered picnic area is acceptable. A trial run may help

## Hand Hygiene

- Students must wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before and after screening.
- Screeners must wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before screening, after any child contact, and at regular intervals throughout the day.
- If soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used.



## Face Coverings

- Both the screener and the student must wear face coverings for the duration of the screening.
- Though close contact (within six feet for three or more minutes) should be avoided to the greatest extent possible, if close contact is necessary due to the nature of the screening (for example, dental or certain vision screenings) appropriate PPE should be worn for the corresponding level of risk.
- Perform hand hygiene before putting on and after removing face masks.



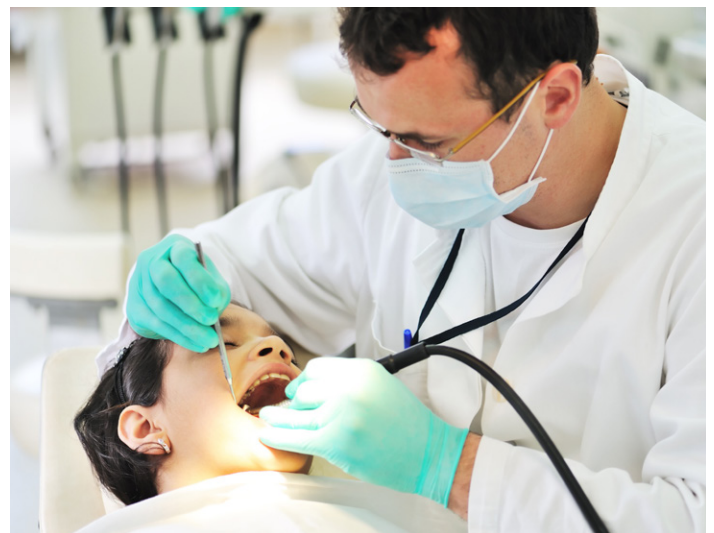
- Do not allow food and beverages in the screening room.
- Do not allow items (e.g., stuffed animals, books) that are difficult to clean or disinfect in the screening location.

## Additional Considerations

- Certain screenings or portions of screenings, such as the developmental screening required for early childhood education programs, may be completed online. Proven effective online or remote options for screening completion should be utilized to the greatest extent possible.
- National guidance recommends postponing color vision deficiency screening if allowable by law. As New Mexico only requires screening for ocular alignment and color vision once in the targeted grade levels, it may be possible to delay these screenings in younger children until a later grade. If there is a noted parent or staff concern in either of these areas, it may be reasonable to refer the child to an eye care provider in the interim period.
- This document is intended to provide general guidance related to COVID-19 mitigation practices during health screenings at school. Please see the Resources and References sections below for additional information regarding specific types of health screenings.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting Considerations for Screening Locations

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often. See [CDC Guidelines for Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene in Schools](#).
- Cleaning products used in the screening area(s) must be secured out of reach from children.
- Use cleaning products per the label instructions and avoid using near children if indicated.
- Ensure adequate ventilation whenever using cleaning products to prevent and limit inhalation of fumes.
- Deep clean and disinfect the screening location, including reusable screening materials and instruments (e.g., photoscreeners, autorefractors, etc.) at the completion of each day.
- If possible, utilize disposable screening supplies. For example, disposable occluders (purchased from an appropriate vendor, not homemade) and lap cards are recommended for vision screening. If screening supplies and equipment must be reused, ensure disinfection occurs after direct use with each child and at the beginning and end of each day per manufacturer's guidelines.



## RESOURCES

- [American Association of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus—Pediatric Vision Screening Guidance during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [ASHA—Audiologists Resuming Services During COVID-19](#)
- [ASHA—Infection Prevention and Control for Audiology Equipment](#)
- [CDC Guidelines for Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene in Schools](#)
- [FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality for Public School Preschool Programs](#)
- [National Center for Children’s Vision and Eye Health—FAQs for Vision Screening Considerations During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic for Schools, Head Start and Early Care and Education Programs](#)
- [National Center for Children’s Vision and Eye Health—Vision Screening Considerations During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-10\) Pandemic for Schools, Head Start, and Early Care and Education Programs](#)
- [New Mexico Administrative Code 7.30.11—Vision Screening Test Standards for Students](#)

## REFERENCES

- [National Center for Children’s Vision and Eye Health. Vision Screening Considerations During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-10\) Pandemic for Schools, Head Start, and Early Care and Education Programs \(October 2020\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene in Schools—Toolkit for School Administrators \(October 2020\)](#)
- [Kansas Department of Health and Environment—Guidance for School-based Vision Screening During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic \(October 2020\)](#)
- [New Mexico Administrative Code. Vision Screening Test Standards for Students \(October 2020\)](#)

