



Empowering People. Building Futures.

NYSED COVID-19 PLAN FOR REOPENING SCHOOLS

REVISED November 2, 2022

**Manuals are updated as needed based on regulatory and/or programmatic changes.*

School Name	Program Site Address	Program(s) provided at this site	Contact Person (Name, Title)	Contact Phone Number	Contact Email Address
Phyllis L. Susser School for Exceptional Children	71-64 168 th Street Flushing, NY 11365	853 (School Age Special Education) Children's Residential Project	Michael Claus, Principal	718-591-8100	michael.claus@birchfamilyservices.org
Washington Heights Education Center	554 Ft Washington Ave New York, NY 10033	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class/Special Class in an Integrated Setting 853 (School Age Special Education) UPK	Karen Hazel, Principal	212-740-5157	karen.hazel@birchfamilyservices.org
Springfield Gardens Education Center	145-02 Farmers Blvd. Springfield Gardens, NY 11434	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class/Special Class in an Integrated Setting 853 (School Age Special Education)	Deborah Costagliola, Principal	718-527-5220	deborah.costagliola@birchfamilyservices.org
Long Island City Early Childhood Center	10-24 49 th Avenue Long Island City, NY 11101	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class	Karen Kaja, Principal	718-786-1104	karen.kaja@birchfamilyservices.org
East Flatbush Early Childhood Center	475 East 57 th Street Brooklyn, NY 11203	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class	Valery Calixte, Principal	718-451-5213	valery.calixte@birchfamilyservices.org
Mill Basin Early Childhood Center	2075 East 68 th St Brooklyn, NY 11234	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class	Lori Vallejo, Principal	718-968-7866	lori.vallejo@birchfamilyservices.org
Riverdale Early Childhood Center	475 West 250 th St Riverdale, NY 10471	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class	Joyce Group, Principal	718-549-4753	joyce.group@birchfamilyservices.org
Pelham Bay Early Childhood Center	2885 St. Theresa Ave Bronx, NY 10461	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class	DeAnna Diamond, Principal	646-975-2700	Deanna.diamond@birchfamilyservices.org
Soundview Early Childhood Center	1880 Watson Ave Bronx, NY 10472	4410 (Pre-school Special Education) Special Class/Special Class in an Integrated Setting Early Learn/UPK	Cynthia Seiden, Principal	718-828-9400	Cynthia.seiden@birchfamilyservices.org

BIRCH FAMILY SERVICES

NYSED COVID-19 PLAN FOR REOPENING SCHOOLS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

The Birch Family Services (Birch) Plan is based on the latest information and requirements from the New York State Education Department (NYSED), New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH), New York City Department of Health and Mental Health Bureau of Childcare (NYCDOHMH) and Executive Order(s) regarding the prevention and management of COVID-19 in the workplace and in school settings. We balance all guidance and requirements issued by these agencies and make revisions as necessary as new guidance is provided in determining our school policies. Our paramount concern is ensuring the health and safety of all of our students, staff, and families as we reopen schools.

POLICY:

Birch Family Services will follow all applicable current and future regulatory requirements and city, state, and federal guidance to ensure that proper protocols are in place and implemented to manage and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in all Birch schools, including but not limited to those related to health and safety, facilities/physical plant, program operations, delivery of educational services, and social-emotional wellbeing. This policy applies to all Birch staff who work in any Birch education program/school.

**Our policies and protocols/procedures comply with the latest NYSED, NYCDOE, CDC, NYSDOH, NYCDOH, NYCDOHMH guidance. Protocols are subject to change at any time and will be updated if/when guidance or requirements of the above regulatory agencies changes. We balance all guidance and requirements issued by these agencies and make revisions as necessary as new guidance is provided in determining our school policies. If it is determined that community transmission and/or transmission within a particular school building is high, we may choose to implement more stringent measures (i.e., masking) during this time.*

**Birch's NYSED COVID-19 Plan for Reopening Schools is consistent with New York State's requirements for the Hero Act and Birch's NY HERO ACT Model Airborne Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Plan.*

Summary of Birch's COVID-19 Plan for Reopening Schools

Development of Plan

Birch's reopening plan was developed as a result of the engagement of school stakeholders (i.e., executive leadership, school administrators, staff, family members, advocacy groups; guidance from city and state health departments, NYSED, and NYCDOE. Meetings were held with various groups of stakeholders and family surveys were completed. Plan revisions also involve input from stakeholders.

Health and Safety

Birch will focus on preventative actions and mitigation strategies, requiring all Birch schools to recognize signs and symptoms of illness in students, staff and visitors. Birch schools have plans to manage and isolate ill individuals until they can be sent home, instruct students and staff in proper hand and respiratory hygiene, require wearing appropriate face masks/coverings and other PPEs as warranted, and implement cleaning and disinfection procedures for the school in accordance with CDC and DOH guidance.

Facilities

Birch schools will continue to implement revised cleaning and disinfection protocols to ensure that they are minimizing the spread of COVID-19 in the buildings. In addition, schools will continue to meet ventilation, water system, and fire safety requirements.

Operations

Birch schools will continue to modify operational systems as needed (e.g., enrollment and attendance, communication, notifications, etc.) in order to adhere to current COVID-19 health and safety requirements.

Education

Birch schools have created a comprehensive plan for full time in-person instruction across our sites while ensuring compliance with state and city health and safety guidelines. If families request a remote only option, they will be referred back to their school district for placement. All plans are clearly communicated to students, families and staff. Birch also has a plan in the event of classroom and/or school building closures described in the section entitled *Confirmed Cases of COVID-19*.

COMMUNICATION/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Birch Family Services, Inc (Birch) engaged with a wide array of school stakeholders and community members, such as executive leadership, school administrators, staff, parents and families, advocacy groups, and school district representatives in developing our plan throughout the planning process. We collaborated with these groups, incorporating and addressing their ideas and concerns. As a result of

our engagement with these important contributors, and ongoing input from our stakeholders, we have created a viable, flexible plan for operating Birch schools.

Birch has developed a Communication Plan for students, parents/families, staff and visitors that includes instructions, training, and a means to provide individuals with information.

Birch's communication with stakeholders includes posting on Birch's website, email contacts, regular mail, virtual meeting opportunities, and in-person meetings while utilizing current health and safety standards. The plan incorporates the following:

- Birch's communication with all stakeholders will include the importance of health and safety and social-emotional well-being.
- School buildings will display environmental print promoting infection control strategies (e.g., cough/sneeze etiquette, proper handwashing, importance of staying home when sick, reporting symptoms of and exposure to COVID-19, etc.).
- Emails are sent to families whenever there are changes in the guidance that affect their children's program.
- Birch's Training Department will provide education and training for all education staff on all components of this plan-
- Birch designated staff will ensure that the NYSED plan is posted on Birch's website.

Birch's communication with students will include health and safety protocols. This will be accomplished by classroom staff incorporating health and safety rules into instruction by utilizing age-appropriate strategies to encourage, teach, and reinforce such skills (e.g., proper hand hygiene, etc.).

Birch will encourage all students, staff, and visitors to adhere to the latest guidance from the CDC and DOH regarding the use of PPE. Staff will continue to receive training on current health and safety standards.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Birch will follow current state and city guidance.

In order to ensure the health and safety of students, staff, and visitors, Birch is currently using protocols based on the CDC and DOH, addressing the following: use of PPE and face coverings, hand washing and respiratory etiquette, recognizing signs of illness, managing illness, exhibiting symptoms/ isolation, confirmed cases of COVID-19, and accommodations as follows:

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Birch will ensure that appropriate PPE and face coverings will be utilized by staff, visitors, and students, based on current health and safety standards. Birch will provide staff/visitors/students with appropriate face masks/face coverings and PPEs, depending upon the specific need of the individual.

Masks/Face Coverings

Students, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, may choose to wear a mask all the time or when it makes them feel comfortable (such as when traveling on school bus or for personal health reasons, or because they are not vaccinated or live with someone who is at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19). Per NYCDOH, masks are optional for all, except under the following circumstances regardless of vaccination status or prior infection:

- If an individual tests positive, masks are required for that individual (staff and school age students) when they return to the school building on days 6 -10, including when traveling on a school bus.
- Masks are required for any individual if they develop COVID-like symptoms while in the building.
- Masks are required for all individuals when they enter the nurse's office.

Per NYCDOHMH Bureau of Childcare, preschool students should wear a mask:

- When attending preschool until Day 10 after symptom onset or date of positive test.
- Individuals may remove their masks following two negative COVID-19 tests taken 48 hours apart.
- Any preschool student who cannot consistently and correctly wear a mask can return to the preschool program on Day 6 if symptoms are resolving and they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

Per NYCDOH, masks are strongly recommended for all individuals for 10 days following exposure to a positive person and when indoors in crowded settings.

Hand Washing and Respiratory Etiquette

Birch will continue to utilize current protocols for hand washing and respiratory etiquette in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

Signs of Illness

Birch staff continues to receive training on recognizing signs of illness in themselves and others. Staff are expected to report signs of illness in themselves to their supervisor and go home and get tested for COVID-19. In addition, they are expected to report signs of illness in students to the school nurse/Administrator on Duty. Families of students who exhibit signs of illness will be asked to keep their child home and have them tested for COVID-19.

Symptoms associated with COVID-19 may include:

Fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

Additional symptoms may include:

Flushed cheeks, rapid or difficulty breathing, fatigue and/or irritability, and frequent use of the bathroom, neck pain, and bloodshot eyes.

Staff will observe for emergency warning signs related to COVID-19 which include the following:

Trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, bluish lips or face, and severe abdominal pain (in children).

If staff observe any of the above emergency symptoms, they will immediately inform the nurse, principal, and call 911 for an ambulance. Parents will be notified immediately.

Parents should observe for the above listed symptoms associated with COVID-19 and additional signs of any illness. They will be advised to not put their child on the bus if the child shows symptoms of illness or has a fever. If parents observe any of the above symptoms, they should contact their health care provider for assessment and testing.

Parents will also be informed to observe for emergency warning signs related to COVID-19 as listed above, and to immediately call 911 for an ambulance.

Managing Illness

Students, families, and staff will be advised about when they should stay home and when they can return to school/work. Staff will immediately inform the principal and nurse if they develop COVID-19 like symptoms during the school day, and they will be instructed to leave the building and get tested.

Staff will immediately inform the principal and nurse if a student develops COVID-19 like symptoms during the school day and follow guidance from the nurse or designee. Students who exhibit symptoms during the course of the day will be isolated from others with staff supervision and will be sent home as soon as possible and parents will be instructed to have their child tested. For staff and visitors, they will be asked to leave the building immediately, but if unable to do so, will be isolated from others until they are able to leave. The area where the ill individual is isolated will be cleaned after being used.

Exhibiting Symptoms/Isolation

Upon families or staff notifying the school nurse or designee that they have been exposed to or tested positive for COVID-19, the school designee will instruct the family or staff to follow CDC guidance for caring for oneself and others.

- Per NYCDOH, if an individual has **symptoms of illness**, they will be instructed to stay home and get tested; if using at home test kits, individuals should take two tests 24 hours apart.
 - Families are expected to provide an absence note for their child upon return to the school building.
- Per CDC/DOH, if an **individual tests positive for COVID-19**, they must isolate for 5 days following symptom onset or 5 days following date of positive test if they remain symptom-free. They must wear a mask days 6 – 10 to return to the school building. They must also be fever free without fever-reducing medication for 24 hours prior to returning to the building.
 - Per NYCDOH, for the purpose of determining length of isolation and masking period: Day 0 is the day of COVID-19 symptom onset and Day 1 is the first full day after the day symptoms started. If no symptoms, Day 0 is the test date and Day 1 is the first full day following the test date.

- Per NYSDOH/NYSED, if someone develops symptoms within the 10 days of testing the clock restarts at day 0 on the day of symptom onset.
- Per NYSDOH/NYSED, **after having ended isolation, if COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen**, restart isolation at day 0 and the individual/parent should talk to a healthcare provider about their symptoms or when to end isolation.
- Families are expected to provide an absence note for their child upon return to the school building.
- Per NYCDOHMH Bureau of Childcare, preschool students should wear a mask:
 - When attending preschool until Day 10 after symptom onset or date of positive test.
 - Individuals may remove their masks following two negative COVID-19 tests taken 48 hours apart.
 - Any preschool student who cannot consistently and correctly wear a mask can return to the preschool program on Day 6 if symptoms are resolving and they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Per NYS/NYC DOH, **following exposure to an individual with COVID-19**, it is recommended that individuals monitor themselves for symptoms and test on day 5; masking is also strongly recommended for the 10 days following exposure.
 - If the exposure is to a household member with whom the individual has ongoing contact, then it is recommended that the individual monitors themselves for symptoms for 20 days (the 10 period of the household member’s isolation/required precautions plus an additional 10 days following their last exposure to the household member). The individual should get tested on day 15. Masking is strongly recommended for the 20-day period.
 - Per NYC DOH, a close contact is defined as someone who was within 6 feet of someone who tested positive for COVID-19 for a cumulative total of at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period during their infectious period, regardless of mask use or presence of plexiglass/other barriers (starting from two days before symptoms begin or, for individuals without symptoms, two days prior to the positive test result until the time the patient is isolated). In most cases, all people living with someone who has COVID-19 are close contacts. Close contacts may also include home health aides, coworkers, classmates, or friends or families you have spent time with.
- If an **individual has a chronic condition**, such as allergies, medical documentation of the chronic condition and how it presents is required so that the individual may remain in the building as long as they feel well enough.
- **CRP students and staff** working in both the school and residence are also subject to OPWDD guidelines.
- Under certain circumstances the isolation period may be extended in consultation with NYCDOH or as indicated by a medical provider. Birch may require an individual to stay out of work/school for a different period of time based on regulatory requirements.

Confirmed Cases of COVID-19

In the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the school, the designated staff will notify the following:

- All positive cases will be reported to the NYCDOH by the principal or designee
- For positive cases within our preschool programs, per NYCDOHMH Bureau of ChildCare guidance, the principal or designee will contact their borough office. To find your borough office's contact information, visit on.nyc.gov/child-care-boro-offices.
- For positive cases in building with UPK, report preschool cases to the NYCDOE situation room.
- For positive student cases, inform transportation if the student takes the school bus.
- In the event that there is a class/building closure, report to NYSED RA, CPSE/CSE, transportation, and NYCDOH.

The principal will ensure compliance with all regulatory requirements regarding reporting of positive cases, informing individuals who have been exposed of CDC/DOH recommendations, cleaning and disinfecting, etc. In the event of high transmission within a classroom or school building, Birch will consult with NYCDOH, and should Birch need to close a classroom or the entire school building, the classroom and/or entire school building will pivot to remote instruction and operations.

If a classroom or school building pivots to remote instruction, the school's designated staff will inform our NYSED Regional Associate.

Birch will also close schools as mandated by New York State/New York City.

COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing/Surveillance Testing

Birch will comply with all New York State Executive Orders as well as other regulatory agencies regarding testing of students, teachers, and staff. Each Birch school will have a list of local testing sites to which students, families, and staff can be referred. When we are supplied with home test kits, we will offer them to students and staff who exhibit symptoms or exposed in school.

Vaccinations

Vaccination is the best way to prevent COVID-19. Consistent with CDC and NYC/NYSDOH recommendations, Birch encourages eligible students and staff to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations. Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations includes getting all booster doses (for everyone who is eligible) and additional doses (for some people who are immunocompromised). For more information, visit bit.ly/cdc-covid-vaccination-schedules.

Per NYCDOE, all Birch staff are required to be vaccinated (initial series, not boosters). All visitors are required to be vaccinated (initial series, not boosters) to be in Birch school building during school hours. Under emergency circumstances, unvaccinated visitors may be allowed into a school building during school hours with permission from the administrator on duty and while being escorted to and from the designated location in the building.

Per the CDC, the current definitions regarding vaccination are as follows:

- **Fully vaccinated** – defined as being 2 or more weeks following receipt of second dose in a 2-dose series (i.e., Moderna, Pfizer), or 2 weeks following receipt of one dose in a single dose series (i.e., Johnson & Johnson) of the vaccine approved by the FDA or authorized by the FDA for emergency use.

- **Up to date on vaccinations** – defined as being fully vaccinated and having received all additional doses and boosters (as of the date of this plan, per the CDC, individuals ages 5 and older are eligible to receive one booster at least 5 months after completing the primary series, and individuals ages 50 and older are eligible to receive a second booster four months following the first booster) if eligible.

Snow Days/Emergency Building Closures

As of the date of this plan, per NYSED and consistent with NYC DOE, we may pivot to remote instruction on what would otherwise be a day of school closure due to weather and non-weather emergencies, including but not limited to snow, floods, tornadoes, and building fires.

Accommodations

For students, if parents believe that their child is at increased risk for COVID-19 illness or request remote instruction, they will be referred back to their CSE or CPSE administrator to request a change of placement.

Mitigation Strategies

- ***Cleaning and Disinfecting***

School buildings, including furniture and objects/materials, and ventilation and water systems within the buildings will be cleaned/disinfected per CDC and DOH guidelines to minimize the spread of COVID-19. For general cleaning and sanitizing, the principal will ensure that the daily, routine cleaning and disinfection will continue. Cleaning and disinfection products meet EPA disinfection criteria. Upon staff identifying an individual who presents symptoms of COVID-19 or who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the principal or designee will ensure that the contaminated area is cleaned and disinfected.

- ***Ventilation and Filtration***

Birch will continue to ensure that indoor air quality is improved by increasing outdoor air delivery to the building (ventilation) and removing particulates/viral particles from the air (air filtration) to the greatest extent possible.

ATTENDANCE

Students who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate. During this time period, their attendance will be recorded as an excused absence. COVID illness will be managed the same as any other illness that requires students to be absent from school.

TECHNOLOGY AND CONNECTIVITY

The level of access to devices and high-speed internet for all students and teachers for remote teaching and learning will be assessed, monitored, and addressed when necessary.

The principal in consultation with the NYCDOE, will ensure that students and families have access to technology needed for learning, and ensure that students and families have an understanding of how to utilize virtual platforms.

- As of the date of this plan, sites must request devices from the NYCDOE on the families' behalf.
- Birch will provide training on using technology and IT support for students, staff and families and provide professional development for staff on designing effective online/remote learning experiences.

TEACHING AND LEARNING/SPECIAL EDUCATION

In the event that a classroom or entire school building must close due to emergencies, including COVID, the classroom and/or the entire school building will pivot to remote instruction for the duration of the closure.

If the student does not have access to technology, alternative strategies will be used to ensure student participation, such as written packets being sent home, and families participating in workshops in the school building that will provide them with strategies to help them engage their children in instruction.

Per NYSED/NYSDOH, while Birch is not required to provide on-line or remote instruction while schools are open for full-time, in-person instruction we will work with families to offer remote options (such as video clips, phone time, emails, instructional materials, and activities sent home, etc.) if it is deemed to be in the best educational interest of students.