Frequently Asked Questions
for Small Groups

What is the recommended group size?

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department recommends you limit groups to 5 or fewer students. You may be able to increase this number as community transmission levels decrease.

Do staff count toward the group size?

No. Ideally you should keep the group as small as possible but some groups may require additional staffing for student assistance. If you need more than 2 staff members for the group, reduce the student group size.

Why is a different group size recommended for childcare?

As an essential service, childcare remained open through the Stay Home Stay Healthy orders. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) adjusted the cohort or group size to fit the typical ratio size for childcare rooms for preschool-aged children. This is a maximum, and childcare providers may choose smaller group sizes. Childcare centers still follow DOH’s health and safety guidance, which includes symptom monitoring, distancing to the degree feasible, increased hand hygiene, cleaning, and ventilation. In addition, providers are required to wear face coverings.

How do I prevent contact between different groups?

Turn hallways into one-way flow only with a dedicated and entry and exit. Display appropriate signage. Consider one directional flow in hallways with a dedicated entry and exit. If possible, use entrances directly into classrooms. Stagger start and end times of classes to prevent a surge of students in hallways or common spaces all at the same time.

What groups should I bring back?

DOH recommends prioritizing high need students, such as students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, those farthest from educational justice, and younger learners for return to small group in-person learning.

How do I reduce the number of potential close contacts in a group?

Assign seating within the group so the same students sit next to one another. Keep track of the assigned seating in case someone in the group tests positive.

Do I still have to screen students even though I am bringing in only small groups?

Yes. Ensure you complete an attestation or an on-site health screening.

Should students who are medically fragile return for in-person learning?
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For students who are medically fragile or more susceptible to illness, check with the family and their primary care physician to determine when it’s safe to return to in-person learning and any additional precautions.

Can I offer internet drop-in space?

We don’t recommend this unless you can keep it tightly controlled. Consider offering alternatives such as materials that don’t require internet access (packets, booklets, USBs, etc.). If offering in-person technology services:

- Limit the number of workstations to 5.
- Keep a list of who attended each session.
- Keep workspaces physically distanced.
- Monitor the area to ensure students stay physically distanced and wear face coverings.
- Clean and disinfect workstations after students leave.

**Good**: Develop a schedule where the same students come at the same times for internet access.
**Better**: Provide workspaces outside (physically distanced) where students and families can work.
**Best**: Offer small workspaces or offices where one student/family can work alone in a room by themselves.

Do small groups still have to wear face coverings and physically distance?

Yes. Small groups need to wear face coverings and physically distance.

Many specialists normally work with more than 40 students a week. How should specialists limit contact?

Specialists should keep a list of students they see each day. If a specialist tested positive for COVID-19, any student they work with could potentially be a close contact. If possible, limit the number of students a specialist sees.

Can students belong to multiple groups?

We don’t recommended students participate in multiple groups, as it can increase the spread of COVID-19. However, if students must be parts of different groups, try to keep the same students in the groups (e.g. if multiple students need additional help in speech therapy and reading, keep group participants consistent over time).

Can multiple groups be in the same area?

If possible, have only one group per room. If you have limited space, consider the following:

**Good**: Ensure groups are adequately spaced apart from each other and don’t mix. Divide large spaces (like gyms or cafeterias) into separate areas. Use a barrier such as cones or chairs to keep groups from mixing.
**Better**: Use a physical barrier between groups such as cubicle walls to separate groups or move groups outside
where there is plenty of fresh air.

**Best:** Have only one group per room.

**Is there guidance for therapy spaces in terms of square feet and air circulation?**

Maintain 6 feet of physical distancing. If not possible, an additional level of PPE may be required as dictated by L&I. Open windows if possible and adjust the HVAC to bring in the maximum amount of outside air to enter the therapy space. If you need a fan, point it to blow away from people. If the therapy space is very small, check with your COVID-19 supervisor to see if you can increase the filter rating or air exchange rate. Consider holding the class outside if possible, for maximum fresh air.

**My students need to see my mouth for learning. What type of face covering can I use?**

Clear masks are an option. This is a cloth face covering but has a clear panel in front of the mouth. In rare circumstances, you can use a face shield with a drape. The face shield must extend below the chin, to the ears and have no gap at the forehead. The drape must cover the side and bottom edges of the face shield.¹

**My special needs student will not wear a face covering. What do I do?**

See if the student can wear a face shield with a drape instead of a face covering. If they can’t wear any type of covering, contact your COVID-19 manager or HR department. The school is responsible to provide the appropriate PPE for employees.

**How do I clean and disinfect learning tools in between use?**

If the item has not been used in over 7 days, it doesn’t need to be disinfected for COVID-19. Consider removing items you can’t easily clean and disinfect.

**Good:** Clean and disinfect after each use. Check with your district for your cleaning and disinfecting procedures*.

**Better:** Have enough learning tools for the day that you can rotate out, and clean and disinfect at the end of the day.

**Best:** Assign each student a set of learning tools.

*Be sure to observe the required contact time for the disinfectant used and use proper PPE.

**Kindergarteners need to come to school for initial assessments. How can we do this safely?**

Schedule assessments with individual families so that only 1 family interacts with the teacher. Leave time in between appointments for cleaning and disinfecting the area and to allow adequate time for the family to leave until the next family arrives. If students need learning tools for the assessment, ensure you can clean

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¹As stated in [L&I and DOH K-12 Schools – Fall 2020-2021 Guidance](https://www.doh.wa.gov/).
and disinfect them prior to the next use. Consider sending them home with the student if needed for the school year.

**When would a school need to close due to a COVID-19 outbreak?**

If 2 or more students or staff in a group are confirmed to have COVID-19 within a 14-day period, the entire group should quarantine for 14 days.

The entire school should close for 14 days when the school has:

- ≤10 groups and 2 or more groups must quarantine.
- >10 groups and ≥10 percent of groups must quarantine.

Contact your local health department to help assist with school closure decisions.

**How do I transport students safely to school for small groups?**

If you need transportation, try to keep students at least 6 feet apart. Stagger seating or use every other seat. Load the bus from back to front and unload front to back. Assign seating on the bus and keep a record of this. If possible, open windows for maximum ventilation. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, including the tops and backs of seats.

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2 Adapted from DOH [K-12 Schools – Fall 2020-2021 Guidance](#).