



EARLY LEARNING & RESEARCH CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

2021-2022 COVID-19 Guidelines

These guidelines have been developed by the Early Learning & Research Center in alignment with strategies set forth by University Schools and in consideration of state, local, university, and national health guidelines including but not limited to recommendations released by the Tennessee Department of Education and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

2021-2022 In-Person Instruction

The Early Learning & Research Center will implement the 180-day [University Schools Instructional Calendar](#) in a fully in-person educational setting for the 2021-2022 academic year. The ELRC will not offer virtual instruction unless a school-wide shift in instructional format is deemed necessary by state, local, or university officials.

Health Equity Considerations

The Early Learning & Research Center [promotes health equity](#) by ensuring students and staff have resources to support physical and mental health. The ELRC supports an individualized approach for working with children with disabilities consistent with each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Adaptations and alternatives to prevention strategies may be considered while maintaining efforts to protect all students and staff from COVID-19.

Prevention Guidelines

In compliance with local health department directives and in accordance with the most recent CDC recommendations as of April 1, 2022, the ELRC will allow students to opt-out of wearing a mask while at school or participating in school activities. Parents who wish to opt-out of mask wearing for their child must complete an opt-out form for each child in Brightwheel. Should there be a change in the COVID-19 infection rates in Shelby County or a change in University of Memphis or University Schools mask policy, the ELRC may reinstitute a schoolwide mask requirement for all students and staff. The ELRC recommends wearing masks in indoor spaces to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Mask-wearing may be required of individuals in the case of exposure or close contact to a positive COVID-19 case or returning from isolation after a positive COVID-19 test result.

While not required (as of 4/4/22), all faculty, staff, parents, family members, and visitors are encouraged to wear a mask while at school or participating in school activities such as pick-up, drop-off, meetings, and school events, and are asked not to attend school events if demonstrating COVID-19 symptoms or after a recent

exposure. The ELRC and all related programs will layer multiple [prevention strategies](#) to help slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. The ELRC reserves the right to require masks at school events. Masking expectations will be communicated prior to each event.

If a student chooses to wear a mask, they should continue to bring at least 2 masks (disposable or reusable) to school per day. Appropriate mask wearing procedures will be shared with students and reinforced in school.

Students must still submit proof of state required immunizations as outlined in the Family Handbook, but this immunization does not include vaccination for COVID-19.

Temperature Screenings

In accordance with the most current [CDC recommendations](#), we strongly encourage parents and guardians to monitor their children for [symptoms of infectious illness](#) at home, including a temperature of 100.4 or greater

Masks

While mask-wearing has been deemed optional as of 4/1/22, masks are still encouraged. The following will serve as guidelines for individuals who choose to wear a mask:

- Students may remove their masks while eating during lunch.
- Students in music and P.E. will remove their masks for instruction when socially distanced in class.
- Students should bring at least 2 masks (disposable or reusable) to school per day. The school has a supply of extra masks if needed.
- All individuals are encouraged to wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol after touching or removing a mask.
- Masks should be stored in a safe location to keep them clean, such as in a pocket or backpack. When reusing a mask after a break, keep the same side should be kept facing out.
- Masks should not be worn during activities that could get masks wet. A wet mask can make it difficult to breathe and may become less effective in preventing the spread of germs (this may include outdoor recess during the hotter months and P.E. class).
- Masks should be removed while sleeping.

Cohorting

Cohorts (or “pods”) are small groups of students and staff who stay together throughout the day to minimize exposure to other people while at school. Cohorts should have the same staff stay with the same group of students as much as possible. The use of cohorts can limit spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 between groups and minimize risk of exposure when an individual tests positive.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the ELRC staff and students remained in strict classroom cohorts. The ELRC will expand cohorts in a limited capacity for the 2021-2022 academic year in order to regain socialization and collaboration between classroom communities. Classroom cohorts may be reinstated at any time if the health and safety of staff and students becomes a concern.

Cohorts (including students and staff) may share and gather together in assigned indoor and outdoor spaces. Cohorts will be designated as follows:

Cohort 1	Reggio Emilia 2's (Carol) & Reggio Emilia 2/3's (Anna Grace)
Cohort 2	Reggio Emilia 3's (Kate) & Montessori (Ligia)
Cohort 3	Reggio Emilia 4's (Erin) & University Pre-K (Katie)

Physical Distancing

The ELRC will enforce universal physical distancing guidelines regardless of vaccination status. [Physical distancing](#) provides protection for staff and students by reducing risk of exposure to COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

The ELRC will promote physical distancing among staff and students (indoors and outdoors) by, to the maximum extent possible, maintaining:

- At least 3 feet between individuals within a cohort
- At least 6 feet between individuals outside of their cohort
- At least 6 feet while eating and drinking without a mask indoors, including among individuals within the same cohort
- At least 6 feet between staff

Early childhood classroom environments are typically designed with many learning centers to be used by small groups of children. While these spaces provide wonderful opportunities for children to learn, play, and interact with one another, teachers will thoughtfully consider ways to enlarge the spaces and limit the number of children within these spaces. Because each ELRC classroom is a unique space, each teacher will independently make adjustments to their routines to accommodate these guidelines.

The ELRC will use physical or visual guides/barriers where possible to reinforce physical distancing in spaces where persons may be interacting with one another.

In order to avoid excessive gathering in hallways, classroom entry/exit will be through individual classroom exterior doors whenever possible.

During nap times, classroom staff will ensure that children's naptime mats (or cots) are sanitized before and after use and are spaced out as much as possible, ideally 3 feet apart. Children should be positioned head to toe in order to further reduce the potential for viral spread. Masks should not be worn while sleeping.

Classroom Materials

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) provides [guidelines for cleaning early childhood classrooms](#), with considerations for both hard and soft surfaces. When selecting materials for use in the classroom, the ELRC will apply the "less is more" concept to optimize use of essential learning materials while minimizing time spent on cleaning multiple materials. Additionally, classroom staff will discourage group sharing of materials that are difficult to sanitize. Teachers will carefully consider what type of materials are easily sanitized vs. those that require more cleaning effort and attention. Teachers are encouraged to replace soft covered, porous materials with easy-to-clean surfaces.

Each teacher will ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high-touch materials to the extent possible or limit use of supplies and equipment to one group of students at a time and clean between uses.

Shared/Outdoor Spaces

Each classroom will remain as a cohesive group throughout the day and limit interaction with individuals outside of their cohort to the greatest extent possible. Given evidence of limited transmission of COVID-19 outdoors, the ELRC will maximize outdoor spaces as an option for extending the physical learning space of classrooms. Shared outdoor spaces will be utilized on a staggered schedule between cohorts. Shared restrooms will be utilized on a staggered schedule between classrooms/cohorts and will be disinfected between uses.

Meals & Snacks

All lunches and snacks will be brought from home and communal snacks will not be provided at school. Parents should label each item with their child's name and ensure that all reusable containers are washed between each use. Each child should bring an individual water bottle as drinking fountains will no longer be in use. Water bottles should be washed daily before returning to school.

Each class will eat lunch in their classroom with children seated three feet apart when possible. Classrooms may stagger lunch times or utilize additional outdoor or indoor spaces to accommodate appropriate distance while eating.

Traditional class parties, shared snacks (such as cake), and homemade goods will not be allowed at this time. Requests to bring individually wrapped, prepackaged, store-bought food/snacks for special occasions must be submitted to the director for approval.

Arrival & Departure

Each ELRC classroom will determine whether students will enter through exterior classroom doors or interior hallway doors for daily arrival and departure. Routines for arrival and departure will be communicated with families prior to the start of school.

Each student's belongings will be separated from others' and stored in individual, labeled containers, cubbies, or areas.

Families must abide by the ELRC's COVID-19 protocols at all times when on ELRC property, including during pick up and drop off. All individuals entering the ELRC must maintain an appropriate distance from students, staff, and other parents at all times. Parents may enter classrooms in accordance with the times and guidelines set forth by each individual classroom teacher. Any parent admitted to the classroom may be asked to complete a health screening.

Classroom staff will perform routine health screenings throughout the day. Families will report any known exposure and monitor their children daily for signs of infectious illnesses, including COVID-19. Students with signs or symptoms of infectious illness should remain home when sick and/or seek medical care. Any child or staff member exhibiting one or more of the following will not be admitted to the facility:

- Temperature reading of 100.4 or above
- Any [signs of illness](#)
- Known recent exposure

Hand hygiene stations will be set up at the entrance of each classroom, so that children can clean their hands before they enter. All sign-in and sign-out will be contactless and facilitated through Brightwheel using posted QR codes or using a kiosk. Daily sign in/out is required by Tennessee Department of Education childcare licensure guidelines and will be strictly enforced.

Visitors

Non-essential visitors will continue to be minimized in an effort to reduce risk of outside exposure. Any visitor admitted into the school must check in at the front office to request admittance and may be screened for signs of illness or history of exposure. Any visitor exhibiting one or more of the following will not be admitted to the facility:

- Temperature reading of 100.4 or above
- Any [signs of illness](#)
- Known recent exposure

Any requests for in-person academic or research-based observation must be submitted to the director in advance for approval. No observers will be admitted into the building without director approval. Any approved observations must be conducted from a distance of at least 6 feet from all school staff and students at all times. Visitors must follow all COVID-19 protocols while on-site. Any visitor diagnosed with COVID-19 should inform the school as soon as possible, [isolate](#), and may not return to the school until [requirements for end of isolation are met](#).

If specialized staff or service providers (for example, speech language pathologists) are providing services to students within multiple cohorts or multiple programs, especially when physical distance cannot be maintained, the staff should take prevention measures to limit spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, including wearing masks and other necessary personal protective equipment.

Health & Wellness

The ELRC will increase the frequency of handwashing and hand hygiene routines throughout the day. All children and staff will engage in hand hygiene at the following times:

- Arrival to the facility and after breaks
- Before and after preparing food or drinks
- Before and after eating or handling food, or feeding children
- Before and after administering medication or medical ointment
- Before and after diapering
- After using the toilet or helping a child use the bathroom
- After coming in contact with bodily fluid such as coughing, sneezing, vomiting, and those related to diapering and toileting
- After handling animals or cleaning up animal waste
- After playing outdoors or in sand
- After handling garbage

Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds using [CDC recommended procedures](#). If hands are not visibly dirty, alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol can be used if soap and water are not readily available. ELRC staff will supervise children when they use hand sanitizer and assist children with handwashing. After assisting children with handwashing, staff members should also wash their hands.

ELRC Illness Policies

Any child or staff member that is sick will not be allowed at school. Illness policies as published in the ELRC Family Handbook will be strictly enforced. Children and staff who come to school sick or become sick while at school will be separated from others and sent home as soon as possible as detailed below. Sick children or staff members will not be allowed to return to work until they have met the [CDC criteria to discontinue home isolation](#) and/or have a written release from a physician to return to school.

Symptomatic Children

Children who become [symptomatic](#) during the school day will be isolated in the designated quarantine zone with a staff member until parents arrive. Parents will be required to pick up their child within 30 minutes of initial contact. Students who are sent home may return to school only with a written release from a physician to return to school.

- The ELRC will follow UofM and CDC guidelines if an infected person has been in a school building. These guidelines include measures for contact tracing, communications, disinfecting/sanitization, and potential closure of a classroom or school facility

If a Student, Faculty, or Staff Member Tests Positive

It is imperative to community health that the school administrators be made aware of any student or staff member that has tested positive for COVID-19. All staff and students can be assured of confidentiality and privacy when reporting their positive test results to the school director. The ELRC will follow all current CDC, and health department guidance on what to do when students or staff exhibit symptoms and when a case is suspected/confirmed.

Students or staff who exhibit symptoms will be directed home to self-isolate and seek medical attention, as necessary. Positive or suspected cases will be confirmed with the local Health Department who will assist with developing recommended next steps based on the level of potential exposure.

ELRC administrators will [take action](#) to [isolate](#) people who begin to have symptoms from other children and staff. Designated isolation areas will be used to isolate a sick student or staff member. The ELRC will ensure that isolated children are still under adult supervision.

The ELRC will close off areas used by a sick person and will not use these areas until after [cleaning and disinfecting](#) them; this includes surfaces or shared objects in the area, if applicable. Cleaning and disinfecting will occur within the first 24 hours after the sick person has been in a space.

Staff members or students with COVID-19 or with confirmed exposure to someone with COVID-19 should not return to school until they have met the [CDC recommendation](#) to discontinue home isolation. Individuals with COVID-19 should isolate for 5 days and if they are asymptomatic or their symptoms are resolving (without fever for 24 hours), follow that by 5 days of wearing a mask when around others to minimize the risk of infecting people they encounter. Students will not be marked absent if their absence is due to exposure to COVID-19. Once the affected individual has met all the CDC criteria for ending isolation, then no additional testing is needed to return to the facility.

Quarantine Guidelines

If a staff member or a student is determined to be a [close contact](#) to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, the following protocols must be observed:

- For individuals who are unvaccinated or are more than six months out from their second mRNA dose (or more than 2 months after the J&J vaccine) and not yet boosted, CDC now recommends quarantine for 5 days followed by strict mask use for an additional 5 days.
- Individuals who have received their booster shot do not need to quarantine following an exposure but should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the exposure. For all those exposed, best practice would also include a test for SARS-CoV-2 on day 5 after exposure. If symptoms occur, individuals should immediately quarantine until a negative test confirms symptoms are not attributable to COVID-19.

Additional Considerations

The ELRC requests that students, their families, and staff follow [guidance for travelers](#) before returning to the ELRC in an effort to reduce exposure to COVID-19. Any individuals who are not fully vaccinated should consider a screening test when returning from time spent away from school.

If available, routine [screening testing](#) can help to identify cases of COVID-19 in asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic people, and prevent secondary transmission.