

Air Circulation

In-Person Learning Resources for Parents and Caregivers at Chicago Public Schools — A Resource Created by Healthy Schools Campaign for Parents and Caregivers in Chicago Public Schools

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**HEALTHY SCHOOLS
CAMPAIGN**

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Air Circulation

Air circulation, also referred to as ventilation, is a key component of infection control for COVID-19. Because the virus is spread through droplets that may linger in the air, it is important for all buildings to provide the best ventilation and highest level of air circulation possible. This filters out infected air and keeps fresh, pure air inside rooms. Bringing more “fresh air” into a room reduces the risk that someone would breathe in enough virus to become infected.

What Experts Say

To improve indoor air quality in schools, experts recommend 4-6 air changes per hour (ACH) for classrooms through a combination of strategies:

- Bring in more fresh outdoor air
- Filter indoor air
- Supplement ventilation
- Filtration with air cleaning devices

There is [detailed guidance from public health experts](#) on the type of air filters recommended, which portable air cleaners may be useful and how to replace filters. All re-circulated air should pass through a high-efficiency filter (those rated MERV 13 or higher). Filters should be inspected to make sure they are installed and fit correctly.

Windows should be kept open when possible and buildings should use mechanical ventilation to forcibly bring outdoor air in. Schools should keep the ventilation system running even outside of normal school hours (when janitorial staff is there, extracurricular activities, arrival/departure). Experts recommend using ultraviolet technology to help inactivate the virus, especially when options for increasing ventilation are limited.

What CPS Says

CPS hired state-certified environmental specialists to conduct indoor air quality assessments. Their reopening policy states that for a classroom to be ready for students and staff, it must have either an operating mechanical ventilation system including both an air supply and exhaust or at least one operating window and a HEPA air purifier, which the district is providing for all classrooms. Public reports from CPS do not show data on ventilation and the CPS plan does not say if MERV-13 mechanical air filters will be used.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

There is more to learn about the ways CPS is improving air circulation in its buildings. Some questions you can ask your school leaders include:

- Can you share the results of the ventilation testing that was done?
- Are you using MERV-13 or higher filters in the building’s HVAC system?
- What kinds of portable air cleaners are being used in my child’s classroom specifically?
- Will classroom windows be and stay open?
- What will happen in the case of mechanical failure to ventilation systems?
- How often will ventilation systems and portable air cleaners be serviced or checked to ensure they are running properly? Whose responsibility is this?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).