

# Recess + Outdoor Play

**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

MARCH 2021

**HEALTHY SCHOOLS  
CAMPAIGN**

EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO LEARN + THRIVE

## Recess + Outdoor Play

Recess is an important part of the school day for students of all ages. Access to unstructured free time outdoors should be incorporated as frequently as the academic schedule allows. Schools can develop strategies to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in order to allow for continued use of fixed equipment (play structures) and portable equipment.

### **What Experts Say**

Staggered recess schedules, strategies for physical distancing and increased handwashing are elements of a safer recess at schools. Best practices for providing recess time at schools include:

- Recess times should be staggered so that students in different classes can remain separate but have full use of the schoolyard during recess.
- Schools may either allow students in the same class to play together or may promote physical distancing during recess.
- Supervision should be increased to limit high-risk behaviors such as contact sports.
- Schools may increase the amount of available portable equipment (e.g., balls, hoola hoops) or allow students to sign out pieces of equipment to limit the amount of shared equipment.
- Outdoor areas require normal cleaning, but not disinfection. Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds—it is not an efficient use of supplies and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public. High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings should be cleaned routinely. Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
- While direct contact with fixed equipment (play structures, like swings or slides) is likely not a major route of transmission due to virus inactivation in sunlight, increased supervision and [frequent cleaning](#) of shared equipment are strategies that can reduce overall risk during recess.
- Children and staff should wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol before and after recess.
- Masks [may be considered during outdoor recess](#). When physical distancing of more than six feet outside can be ensured, outdoor recess may be an optimal time for mask breaks for younger students.

### **What CPS Says**

CPS playgrounds follow the lead of the [Chicago Park District guidelines](#) regarding play equipment in CPS schoolyards. Playgrounds will not be cleaned or sanitized and students and staff are expected to maintain distance while on the playground, wash hands before and after play and wear masks.

### **Parents and Caregivers Should Know**

Recess is an important part of your child's school day. There are ways that your school may ensure your child has access to recess in a safe way. Some questions to ask your school leaders include:

- Will my child get outdoor recess time during the school day? How often and for how long?
- How will recess be scheduled and managed so that students can stay within their pods?
- Who will be supervising recess?
- Will masks be mandated when children are playing at recess in their pods outside?
- How will recess time be filled if the weather does not allow for outside time?
- What other groups of students and staff will be at recess with my child's class, and how will they be separated? Who will be in charge of supervising that?

- Will the outdoor spaces (aside from the play equipment) remain available for use after school hours?
- What is the plan for safely transitioning students from the classroom to the schoolyard or other recess location and back to the classroom?

*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](#).*