



TJMS PTA Guide for Families About COVID Risk Mitigation Efforts at Thomas Jefferson Middle School, SY 2021-2022

Version 3, Jan. 13, 2022

In response to questions submitted by parents and working in conjunction with school administrators, the Thomas Jefferson Middle School (TJMS) PTA has developed the following information about COVID risk mitigation efforts being undertaken at the school during the 2021-2022 school year, including outdoor lunch procedures. All information is current as of this writing and is subject to change based on updates to school guidelines and procedures.

This document covers the following topics:

- Outdoor Lunch Procedures
- Designated Lunchtime Seating Areas
- COVID Health and Safety Protocols
- Quarantine and Isolation
- Free Weekly COVID Testing
- Building Ventilation and Air Purification
- Optional Breakfast
- Locker Use
- Personal Device Use
- Donation Needs, Questions

Outdoor Lunch Procedures

TJMS administrators have developed a plan to help protect student health and safety during meals in accordance with CDC and VDH guidelines for schools, as well as with APS Lunchtime Health and Safety Procedures.

Outdoor lunch is available as an option for all TJMS students, weather permitting.

- If the “feels like” (wind chill) temperature is 32 degrees or below, students will eat lunch inside. Students will have access to lunchtime seating in the cafeteria, as well as additional socially distanced seating in the gym.
- If the “feels like” temperature is above 33 degrees, students will be given the option to either eat inside in the cafeteria or outside. Socially distant gym seating is not offered on outdoor lunch days.

In addition to wind chill temperature, other weather-related factors that may prevent outdoor lunch from being offered are when it's actively raining or snowing or if the ground is muddy, wet and/or icy.

The staff makes and announces the decision on outdoor lunch at the beginning of every lunch period based on current weather conditions. Parents should advise their child(ren) to listen for this announcement every day so they don't miss an opportunity to eat outside on outdoor lunch days. TJMS staff make a point of actively promoting the outdoor lunch option to students, to encourage students to take advantage of it, and to support students who may find it difficult to self-advocate for eating outside.

Because the status of outdoor lunch is decided and announced close to the start of each lunch period based on the current weather conditions, it's possible there will be days where only one or two grades have the option to eat outside instead of all three grades.

Staff are required to supervise all designated lunch areas, both indoor and outdoor. TJMS will offer outdoor lunch as much as possible, provided there are staff available to supervise the designated outdoor lunch area.

Going forward, parent volunteers may be considered to supplement TJMS staff in supervising outdoor lunch areas on days when there are COVID-related staffing shortages at the school. As of this writing, the school administration and PTA are developing a plan, and if it is approved, the PTA will share more details and a volunteer signup form with parents.

As students return to the building after lunch, staff remind them to not crowd each other, to put their mask on, to make sure their mask is over the nose and mouth, and to use hand sanitizer upon entering the building.

Staff regularly remind students to responsibly dispose of their trash/recycling at the close of the lunch period, and parents are encouraged to reinforce this message at home. Currently, the school has adequate trash/recycling cans available for the outdoor lunch periods. Trash concerns are never a factor in staff decision-making around whether or not outdoor lunch will be offered on a given day.

TJMS administrators estimate that on days when outdoor lunch is an option, the vast majority of students (more than two-thirds) in each of the lunch periods opt to eat outside, with the remainder opting to eat inside, in the cafeteria. This has been consistently observed by the staff since the start of the school year.

Many students have taken advantage of the opportunity to play soccer or engage in other physical activity during the lunch period, conditions permitting. Soccer balls and other PE equipment are provided during the lunch period to promote physical activity.

Designated Lunchtime Seating Areas

Indoor Cafeteria Area – Students have the option to eat indoors daily in the cafeteria. Because not all students will opt to eat in the cafeteria on any given day, the cafeteria offers ample space for students to spread out.

Indoor Gym Area – For days when students cannot go outside, they may opt to eat in a socially distanced space set up in the gym that is separate from community members who use the gym. The desks in this area are arranged in rows faced in the same direction and spaced 6-10 feet apart.

(Note: Though COVID-related staffing shortages affected the indoor lunch setups on Jan. 10 and 11 following the return to school after winter break, administrators report they now have a plan in place to ensure adequate coverage of indoor lunch areas during staffing shortages going forward. Parent volunteers are not needed or eligible to monitor indoor lunches at this time.)

TJMS shares use of its gym with the community through prior agreement with Arlington County, and as such, the school is unable to set up permanent lunchtime seating in the gym during the 2021-2022 school year. Community members using the gym have their own designated area and are not permitted to come onto the school side of the gym. The track is currently closed to the community. Lunchtime seating in the gym will only be offered to students on days with inclement weather to provide additional socially distanced seating.

Outdoor Lunch Area – The designated outdoor lunch area is on the back side of the school (i.e., the gym side nearest to the athletic fields). Outdoor lunch is not offered on the front side of the school (i.e., Fleet side).

Students have access to the majority of the athletic fields area, including the area between the Jefferson Garden and the upper field, the areas along the sides of the athletic fields, and the shaded park area located up the hill and adjacent to the bridge over Route 50. (However, the upper field area is closed for turfing.)

Outdoor seating is available in the form of all-weather metal mesh tables and other picnic tables located in the area around the Jefferson Garden, as well as existing bleacher seating next to the athletic fields. Estimated seating provided through metal tables, picnic tables and bleacher options comes to about 140-160 seats, with additional ground seating options for students who prefer to sit on the lawn when conditions are appropriate.

With regards to offering an outdoor lunch area for students, the conversation that APS administrators have had with TJMS administrators to date has focused on the use of tables, benches and/or umbrellas, not more permanent outdoor structures. A permanent tent structure is not being planned for the Jefferson outdoor area at this time.

Other than the cafeteria and the gym, classrooms and other areas of the school are not used for lunchtime seating, helping to consolidate the required contract-tracing efforts and enabling those teachers/staff who are not supervising lunchtime activities to have their contractually guaranteed unencumbered lunch period.

COVID Health and Safety Protocols

Layered prevention strategies are in place in all Arlington Public Schools, including wearing a mask while indoors, vaccination and boosters. APS encourages everyone to get vaccinated and boosted when eligible.

View APS vaccination guidance here:

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2021-22/health-safety-information/covid-19-vaccines-for-5-11-year-olds/>

View Arlington County vaccine guidance for the general public here:

<https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Health/COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccine>

Masks will be required, regardless of vaccination status, while inside all APS buildings and on school buses, but they are not required when eating or when outside during recess, PE, athletics or other activities. There is not currently an APS requirement for mask type or style, but students must wear masks properly so that they cover the mouth and nose. The APS approach to universal masking aligns with CDC guidance, as well as the recommendations of local and state public health authorities.

Contact tracing is the process of identifying individuals who are considered close contacts to someone with a positive or probable case of COVID-19. Following APS guidance, during a contact tracing investigation, TJMS administrators and school health clinic staff will confirm the report of a positive diagnosis, identify students and employees who meet the close contact definition, and notify close contacts to inform them of their exposure.

Parents can access an overview of APS Health and Safety Information that applies to all APS schools, including TJMS, here:

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2021-22/health-safety-information/>

Review APS Health and Safety Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) here:

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2021-22/health-safety-information/faq/>

Quarantine and Isolation

Quarantine happens when a person has been identified as a close contact of someone who has COVID-19. Isolation happens when a person tests positive for COVID-19.

Effective Jan. 17, APS will adopt the CDC's revised guidance on quarantine and isolation, as follows:

- APS will reduce the quarantine period for students and staff to five days. Students who are exempt from quarantine (e.g., those with up-to-date vaccinations, are asymptomatic and are able to wear a mask) will be excluded and verified by Contact Tracers before being able to return to school. (Note: Quarantine keeps someone who was in close contact with COVID-19 away from others.)
- APS will reduce the isolation period for staff to five days. (Note: Isolation keeps those who test positive for COVID-19 away from others, even in their own home.)
- APS will maintain current 10-day isolation period for students with COVID-19; this is per CDC guidance that the reduced timeframe be implemented for students only with consistent physical distancing and mask protocols in place at all times, including during meals. Since we cannot maintain distancing consistently, per CDC, APS will maintain 10 days isolation for students with COVID-19.

Review the CDC guidance here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>

Review the latest APS Quarantine and Isolation guidance here:

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2021-22/health-safety-information/contact-tracing-quarantine-isolation/>

Free Weekly COVID Testing

APS provides free COVID-19 testing (symptomatic and asymptomatic) in-school for students, with parent/guardian consent, and staff. All testing is free with no out-of-pocket charges, regardless of whether or not families are insured.

Effective Jan. 1, 2022, APS has a new provider for COVID testing on-site at the school, CIAN Diagnostics, and TJMS has a new assigned testing day – Tuesdays, 7:30-9:30 a.m.

Parental consent is required before any students can be tested. All parents must opt in using the CIAN Diagnostics online form here:

<https://www.cognitofrms.com/CIANDiagnostics1/visstateestingprogramconsentformapss tudents>

Parents must fill out the CIAN Diagnostics consent form even if they already filled out a consent form for the previous testing provider last fall.

Once a parent fills out the consent form and the student's name appears on the approved list, the testing becomes optional for that student. Using the approved list provided by APS, TJMS staff every Tuesday morning will call students down for testing by grade level and alphabetically, and teachers will encourage students to take advantage of the testing.

The staff cannot compel a student on the approved list to be tested if that student declines to be tested or if the student misses the testing session for some other reason.

View more APS guidance on COVID-19 testing here:

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2021-22/health-safety-information/covid-19-testing/>

Building Ventilation and Air Purification

TJMS's facilities meet the air quality and ventilation standards set for all APS schools, which were established by APS after consulting a ventilation assessment process during the 2020-2021 school year. Information on the ventilation studies is here:

<https://www.apsva.us/maintenance/return-to-school-building-ventilation-studies/>

The APS Indoor Air Quality and Ventilation Fact Sheet is here:

<https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/air-qual-fact-sheet.pdf>

APS answers to frequently asked questions are here:

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2020-21/health-safety/safety-at-school/air-quality-and-ventilation-frequently-asked-questions/>

TJMS has dedicated building HVAC (heating, ventilation and cooling) systems that allow maximum outside air ventilation, with all building filters replaced on a quarterly basis.

Additionally, individual air purifiers are in place, with one purifier per classroom. The air purifiers used in classrooms are APS-recommended Blue Air-brand carbon filters, which are serviced and maintained to meet the manufacturer-recommend standard, i.e., most filter replacements happen at 6-8 or 8-12 months, depending on the unit.

The classroom units work equally as effectively regardless of where they are physically placed within a room, as long as there is adequate air flow on all sides of the unit. TJMS does not encourage teachers to place the units in the center of the room because it creates a tripping hazard, and placement at the center of the room is not more effective than placement elsewhere.

Purifiers for larger spaces like the library have higher filtration levels than the classrooms. Two purifiers are in place in the library, and purifiers have been placed in the offices and meeting rooms of the counseling staff.

Multiple air purifiers used in the cafeteria are commercial units selected based on square footage.

To increase ventilation in the indoor eating areas, the school will consider opening doors adjacent to the cafeteria (and gym on inclement weather days) to increase air flow in these spaces case by case, conditions permitting. Windows cannot be opened to increase cafeteria air flow because there are no windows in the cafeteria.

Optional Breakfast

TJMS offers free breakfast to students in the cafeteria starting at 7:20 a.m. The number of students who have taken advantage of the breakfast option has been small enough to justify keeping all students in the cafeteria for breakfast without an outdoor option. This approach may be revisited if numbers increase enough to justify outdoor breakfast procedures.

Locker Use

Lockers have not been made available to students this year because TJMS locker areas do not provide enough space for adequate social distancing. An alternate coat storage area is not available at this time.

Though students may prefer not to carry coats around school with them in addition to their backpacks, parents are encouraged to make sure their children dress appropriately for the weather when there are colder temperatures and inclement weather.

TJMS administrators might be able to revisit the topic of lockers for students at some point later in the school year, should COVID conditions change. The school will continue to monitor COVID cases and county guidance to look for opportunities to reopen this discussion when possible.

Personal Device Use

TJMS's policy for student phones at school is that all students must turn off their phones and put them away from 7:40 a.m. until the school dismissal bell rings at 2:24 p.m. Since the start of the school year, TJMS leadership has communicated phone policy and other rules of conduct to students in groups by grade level.

Phone use during the day is not allowed, and first offenders will receive a warning. Students who violate the rule a second time will have the phone taken away and returned at the close of the school day. Repeat offenders will have their parents called with the phone taken away and released only to the parent at the end of the school day.

Students are required to have their school-issued iPads available during indoor dining to enable them to scan the QR code at the table for contact tracing.

Donation Needs, Questions

APS supplies TJMS with sanitization items for student use such as disposable masks and hand sanitizer, with hand sanitizer stations placed throughout the school building.

As of this writing, the PTA is advised that parent donations of those items are not necessary, but if donations are needed in the future, the school and/or the PTA will alert families and invite them to donate.

If there are potential opportunities for parent-driven donations to support COVID risk mitigation not addressed above, the school is open to discussing such opportunities.

Parents with questions or suggestions not covered above are welcome to send them directly to Lakesha Gray, Secretary to the Principal, at 703-228-5900 or lakesha.gray@apsva.us; Assistant Principal Vincent Jarosz at vincent.jarosz@apsva.us; or the PTA at president@tjmspta.org.