



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Recommendations for Mandated School Hearing and Vision Screening During the COVID-19 Pandemic March 25, 2021

Hearing and vision screening are essential tools for detecting children at risk for hearing and vision problems. Timely identification and management of hearing and vision problems can minimize the risk of negative academic consequences for students. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted school hearing and vision screening operations in Maryland. Recognizing the importance of continuing to conduct the hearing and vision screenings mandated under the Annotated Code of Maryland Education Article §7-404 and the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.05.05.07, the Maryland Department of Health and Maryland State Department of Education recommend the following strategies to protect the health and well-being of students, families, teachers, and staff.

Modifications to the standard hearing and vision screening assessments

- **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity for physical distancing and other safety protocols, an abbreviated vision screening assessment is recommended with ONE of the following screening modalities:**
 - 1) Instrument-based screening using a photoscreener that allows performing the test from a safer distance (at least 3 feet), when available, for all ages OR
 - 2) Distance visual acuity, tested monocularly for each eye, when a photoscreener is unavailable or a student cannot successfully cooperate for the photoscreening.
- In order to minimize screening duration time, avoid close proximity between the screener and the student, and avoid the need for extensive cleaning and disinfecting of screening instruments between students, the following vision screening assessments are not recommended at this time:
 - Color vision deficiency
 - Stereoacuity screening
- **It is recommended that the standard hearing screening assessment using pure tone audiometry or play audiometry continue to be conducted.**

Planning and scheduling hearing and vision screening

- **Screening area**
 - To the extent possible, locate the screening area in a large open space such as a gymnasium, auditorium or library. For hearing screening, choose a location with low ambient noise.

- Ensure there is adequate ventilation in any space selected for conducting screenings.
- Ensure access to handwashing facilities with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer for screeners and students.
- Regulate flow of people into and out of the screening area with a separate entrance and exit if possible, one-way flow of traffic, clear signage, and markings on floors and seating to maintain 6-foot distancing.
- To the extent possible, use physical barriers (ex. Plexiglass) in the screening area to provide additional separation between screeners and students if the barriers will not interfere with screening.
- Limit the number of students in the screening area according to the space available.

Resources

Ensure availability of the following:

- Disposable masks (for anyone arriving to screening without a mask/cloth face covering or who needs a replacement) and transparent face masks for the screener to use with students who benefit from speechreading cues
- Disposable gloves
- Hand sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol
- Cleaning and disinfecting supplies, including EPA-registered disinfectants effective against COVID-19
- Face shields and other forms of eye protection for screeners are optional. However, it may be appropriate for screeners to use face shields or eye protection in addition to wearing a mask/cloth face covering in the following situations:
 - Working with students unable to manage secretions
 - Working with students unable to wear a mask/cloth face covering
- To the extent possible, use disposable matching cards and eye occluders or individual adhesive eye patches to cover the non-tested eye if these are necessary for vision screening
- To the extent possible, use disposable covers for headsets and earphones

Schedule

- Schedule students with appointments for a specific date, time, and screener to reduce exposure and facilitate social distancing and contact tracing, if needed.
- Develop a process for conducting hearing and vision screening for students attending school virtually. Consider having special dates and times for screening events for these students. For these screenings only, one parent/guardian may accompany the student if necessary.
- Allow enough time between appointments to support physical distancing and allow for necessary cleaning and disinfecting.

Prior to the screening

- The hearing and vision screening notification form should include the following:
 - Reminder to parents of the school system or school's COVID-19 preventive recommendations and protocols to follow during the screening process

- School protocols to be followed in case a student develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- Student and screener (and parent/guardian if present) should have a symptom screening before entering the hearing and vision screening space (if not already completed at school that day).

Preventive measures during screening

- **Masks/face coverings**
 - Consistent with Governor Hogan’s executive orders and MDH/MSDE guidance, screeners and students (and parent/guardian if present) must wear a mask/cloth face covering during hearing and vision screening and at all other times while in the school building and on school grounds.
- **Handwashing and gloves**
 - Screeners and students should wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer before and after screening.
 - Gloves are optional for screeners during the screening itself, but are NOT a substitute for handwashing.
- **Cleaning and disinfecting**
 - Follow school system and school guidelines regarding use and storage of cleaning and disinfecting products.
 - Staff performing cleaning and disinfecting should wear disposable gloves (including screeners who are performing this task).
 - Clean and disinfect the screening area (e.g., tables) and instruments before and after performing assessments.
 - Clean and disinfect any non-disposable screening objects touched by the student between each use.
 - Use non-alcohol based products to wipe off headsets, earphones, and audiometer to minimize rapid degradation of material.
 - Practice routine cleaning of high touch surfaces.

Hearing and vision screeners and other staff

- Ensure screening staff are trained on basic CDC and MDH recommended COVID-19 preventive measures and safety protocols.
- Ensure appropriate staff are trained on proper cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

Recommendations for resuming standard screening

- When schools resume full in-person activity and the standard vision screening assessment can be accomplished safely, then the standard vision screening assessment should be re-implemented according to the state grade requirements.
- All students who received the abbreviated screening should also be rescreened with the standard vision screening assessment.

References

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