



Nicaragua Christian Academy

"ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE WITH A CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION"



Updated Health Protocols: August 2021

Introduction

The NCAI leadership teams continue to carefully monitor all available data regarding COVID-19 in Nicaragua and around the world. We recognize that we are working in partnership with parents to act wisely and carefully consider both the health risks and the costs associated with mitigation of these risks. Everyone has been affected by COVID-19 in different ways, and there is a diversity of philosophy with regard to managing risk. Our desire is to take a balanced approach to education that is appropriate for our school community.

Our mission to disciple our students, and our relationship with Jesus Christ, compels us to act in love toward all members of our school community. Our health protocols are developed with consideration for levels of risk, our diverse school population, ongoing monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 cases in our region, and our educational goals as a school.

Summary of Changes from Last Year

While we adjust to living with the pandemic and are grateful for God's direct care and man's scientific discoveries, we also know it is important to learn to live and thrive in a world that continues to be seriously affected by health risks. Our learnings from the past year, along with a need to diminish unsustainable burden on staff, have led to the following changes. These changes are *not* motivated by a diminished risk of contagion in Nicaragua, but rather by a commitment to focus on our school's mission and vision while maintaining ways for the members of our school community to decrease their own physical and mental health risks and those of others.

1. **Arrival screening:** Instead of checking temperatures in the parking lot, we will check temperatures at Gates 1, 4 and 6. This change will allow us to continue to emphasize the importance of keeping sick people out while decreasing the daily staffing needs, allowing most of our faculty to return to their normal morning responsibilities.
2. **Before school:** Elementary students will be allowed to go to the playground between 6:45 and 7:05, and will go to the classroom at 7:05. Secondary students will be allowed to wait in the common areas until teachers open their classrooms after faculty devotions. Faculty members will share morning supervision duties.

3. **Dismissal (secondary):** Secondary students will be expected to go to the designated areas of the parking lot when waiting to be picked up, without the need for direct faculty supervision.
4. **After school:** Gates will be left open during after-school hours to allow parents to watch sports, pick up children from extracurricular activities, or visit with teachers and staff. The use of face masks will be required when indoors, and recommended when outdoors. NCAI staff supervision of use of face masks in outdoor areas will end at 2:30 p.m. and individuals will assume responsibility for health risks incurred during this time.
5. **Cleaning surfaces:** Studies have shown that COVID-19 is not usually transmitted through surfaces, and excessive chemicals may have a detrimental effect on people exposed to them. Therefore, we will return to normal cleaning and disinfection practices. Students will not be required to disinfect their desks between classes.

Summary of Health Protocols Remaining the Same

The following health protocols will continue mostly the same as last school year.

1. **Exclusion of sick people:** We will continue to require that sick people, especially those who may have Covid-like symptoms, stay off campus according to our established symptom scale.
2. **Face masks:** Required during arrival/departure, hallways/transitions, in poorly ventilated areas (computer lab, library, music, etc.), in school transportation, and when in closer proximity than 4ft in classrooms. Optional during PE and athletics, and when seated with distance outdoors or in well-ventilated classrooms.
3. **Handwashing:** Strongly encouraged and emphasized at critical times of the day, including before/after eating and before entering computer labs.
4. **Restricted campus access:** During the school day, campus access is restricted to staff, students, and people who have an appointment.
5. **Dismissal (elementary):** Vehicles will still be announced over the intercom system when picking up students. Preschool and elementary students will still remain in classrooms until called.
6. **Response to reports of COVID-19 cases:** When a teacher, student or family member is reported as having Covid, the administration will notify the school community. The affected person and family members will be excluded for 10 days. We will not switch to distance learning unless all criteria in our switch policy are met.

Detailed Description of Health Protocols

If you are not already familiar with our health protocols from last year, please read the following section carefully.

Philosophy

The mission of NCA is “developing spiritual, social, physical and academic excellence in students so that they can be active disciples of Jesus Christ.” The best way to accomplish this mission is through personal and physical presence interactions between students and teachers. Physical presence classes provide the structure, socialization, and stability that are essential to the long-term development of children. As such, we recognize that physical presence education is the preferred mode of teaching and learning for our children.

Our mission to disciple our students, and our relationship with Jesus Christ, compels us to act in love toward all members of our school community. We recognize that COVID-19 has affected the members of our school community in many different ways, and that there are many different underlying philosophies and responses to the situation. Our health protocols are designed to consider three main underlying principles:

1. Mitigate actual health risks by implementing recommended practices from MINSA and other health authorities;
2. Maintain consistent Christian testimony by respecting authorities and the measures they recommend to slow the pandemic;
3. Demonstrate love toward all members of our school community, striving toward a balanced policy that takes into account the perceptions of parents, students and staff, without being controlled by fear.

Strategies

The primary strategies implemented by NCAI to mitigate health risks during physical presence school attendance are:

- Adequate ventilation in most areas of campus
- Strict exclusion of sick people
- Campus access restricted to staff, students, and people who have an appointment
- Entry and exit procedures, including morning screening and screening of all visitors
- Required use of masks during specific times of the day
- Social distancing practices built into school activities
- Culture of handwashing upon arrival and before/after key transitions

Adequate Ventilation

One benefit of our widely open-air campus is that most classrooms have a lot of fresh air entering on a regular basis. We conducted smoke tests in all buildings to watch natural air movement patterns and ensure rapid dispersion of air that could contain airborne particles. In classrooms where less natural air movement existed, additional ventilation was installed. Aside from certain air-conditioned classrooms and common spaces, all teaching areas of campus exceed recommended air renewal rates, which is believed to greatly reduce the risk of transmission of the virus.

Exclusion of Sick People

Anyone who is sick with a contagious illness should not come to school until the period of contagion has passed, including 24 hours without fever or fever-reducing medication. The school nurse will decide borderline cases based on our symptom scale. People who have symptoms that seem to indicate possible COVID-19 infection will be excluded for 10 days unless an alternative diagnosis or testing rules out COVID-19.

Students who are absent due to illness should communicate with their teachers to request make-up assignments.

Restricted Access to Campus

In order to reduce health risks for our school community, parents and visitors will not be permitted to enter the secure areas of our campus before or during school hours unless they have an appointment with a teacher or staff member and follow health screening protocols.

Arrival Screening

All staff and students will be screened each morning upon arrival to school, including checking temperatures and asking whether they or anyone in their household is sick. Campus visitors who arrive before or during school hours and have an appointment will also be screened before entering.

Parent meetings, events and activities during the day or evening will include screening for all attendees upon arrival.

Face Masks

Required use: Face masks are required for all students, staff and visitors during arrival and departure, while in the hallways and during transitions. They are also required in poorly ventilated areas including the computer lab, library, air-conditioned offices and in school transportation.

Well-ventilated classrooms: When students are seated in well-ventilated classrooms with a distance of at least 4 feet between people, face masks may be removed if desired. However, they must be worn when moving closer (e.g. to work in groups) and before standing to leave the classroom.

Athletics, PE, and outdoors: Face masks are optional during PE and transition to/from PE. They are also optional during elementary recess, after-school athletics, and when seated with distance outdoors.

Young students: Due to the logistical challenges of mask enforcement, students in third grade and below will be permitted to remove their masks when in the classroom, outdoor lunch area, and playground.

After school: Standard mask policies will continue to apply to classrooms and other indoor spaces (excluding the Eagle Center). For people who stay after school and are in outdoor spaces, we will only enforce standard mask policies until 2:30 p.m. We strongly recommend that people continue to wear face coverings when moving about the campus from 2:30 until at least 4:00 p.m. (or later, if there are still many people on campus). It is the responsibility of parents to decide whether or not to permit their children to stay for after-school activities and clearly communicate what health protocols they expect their children to follow. Families who choose to stay after school assume responsibility for their own health risks.

Replacement masks: If masks are forgotten, damaged or lost while at school, the cost of \$0.50 for a replacement mask will be charged to family accounts.

Social Distancing

All school activities, including seating in the classrooms, chapels, meetings and other school events, will be planned taking into account appropriate distancing between participants. The minimum distance between people is 4 feet, although more is better when possible.

On-Campus Lunch and Breaks

Students are only permitted to eat in designated lunch areas where we can easily supervise adherence to our school policies. Chairs are set up with appropriate distance and should not be relocated. Students should wear masks when in the hallways, cafeteria, and finding a place to sit. They may remove their mask once seated at a designated lunch table, and should replace it before standing up.

In order to reduce congestion in the cafeteria, students in 4th-12th grade will not be permitted to enter the cafeteria without a student ID card (for faster payment). Students may continue to use their ID cards from a previous school year; replacement student ID cards cost \$5.00 and can be requested in the front office.

Handwashing

Students will be encouraged to wash their hands upon arrival at school, before and after eating, and before entering the computer labs.

Travel Quarantine

A travel quarantine is not required in Nicaragua. However, we ask that anyone who has traveled or been in situations of increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 more carefully monitor their health. If symptoms appear, they should immediately quarantine, report their symptoms to the school nurse, and follow instructions from the school.

Switch Criteria and Response to Reports of COVID-19

Under certain public health crisis situations, it may be necessary to adjust our educational delivery system for the safety and protection of our entire educational community. We have three primary models of operation, each of which seeks to provide as many of the benefits of physical presence classes as feasibly possible, considering the current levels of health risks in our community. Our “switch criteria” is the set of indicators and thresholds that guide our decision to change between our current model “modified full schedule” and the other two models (reduced schedule / blended learning and 100% distance learning).

Response to Reports of COVID-19

Our health protocols are designed to greatly reduce risk of contagion at school, even when someone who is sick or contagious is present on campus. The protocols were designed with the general

assumption that there are symptomatic and asymptomatic people in and among us. Consistently following our health protocols helps us avoid falling into the CDC definition of “close contact”.

When a teacher, student or family member is reported as having COVID-19 (official diagnosis, unofficial diagnosis by private physician, or strong suspicion of Covid based on symptoms), the following steps will be taken:

1. The administration will communicate with all school parents, students and staff informing them of the Covid report (and being clear whether this was an “official diagnosis by MINSA” or an “unconfirmed report”).
2. Household members of the student will be excluded for 10 days according to our symptom scale.
3. The classroom(s) of this student will be given a thorough cleaning, sanitizing the desk(s) and chair(s) used by the student.
4. We will not switch the class to distance learning. Parents may make their own decisions regarding school attendance of their children. Students who are absent should communicate with their teachers to request make-up assignments.
5. We will ask teachers of this class to be extra vigilant that our health protocols are carried out completely and not relaxed in any way. This should always be the expectation, but the reminder is appropriate.

Differentiation between Official and Unofficial Reports/Diagnoses

In accordance with our authorities, NCAI cannot consider reported cases of COVID-19 as official unless they are confirmed with a test by MINSA (Ministry of Health) and the results are submitted to NCAI in writing. Although we will communicate all reports we receive with parents, students and staff, we will be clear to differentiate whether the report is based on an official MINSA test or whether it is an unconfirmed Covid report (which would include an unofficial diagnosis by a private physician or strong suspicions of Covid based on symptoms).

Clearly communicating the source of the report is important for other parents to make an informed decision regarding the certainty, severity, and degree of risk presented by the reported case.

Switch Criteria

If an individual class attendance drops below 40%, that class will be moved to distance learning for a period of approximately one week while the rest of the school remains in physical presence classes. If there are verified severe health risks in our community and the whole school attendance drops below 75%, we will transition to a reduced schedule for a period of two weeks (or longer if needed).

If the whole school attendance drops below 40%, we will transition to 100% distance learning for a period of two weeks (or longer if needed).