

## **CTU Fact Sheet on CPS Covid-19 Building Safety**

### **The Covid-19 pandemic remains a serious threat to Chicagoans' health and safety**

- Over 80,000 Chicagoans have contracted Covid-19
- Nearly 3,000 Chicagoans have died from Covid-19
- Chicago still averages about 300 new confirmed Covid-19 cases every day <sup>1</sup>

### **Covid-19 is transmitted by airborne particles that we breathe, travelling more than 6 feet**

We now know that 6-foot social distancing is insufficient to protect people from Covid-19 exposure because particles can remain airborne for many hours and travel much farther than 6 feet. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently reported:

There is growing evidence that this virus can remain airborne for longer times and further distances than originally thought. In addition to close contact with infected people and contaminated surfaces, there is a possibility that spread of COVID-19 may also occur via airborne particles in indoor environments, in some circumstances beyond the 2 m (about 6 ft.) range encouraged by social distancing recommendations. <sup>2</sup>

### **Surgical and cloth masks do NOT protect people from contracting Covid-19**

Surgical and cloth masks are designed to prevent *releasing* the virus into the air. But these masks do NOT provide reliable protection from *inhaling* the virus. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration advises that these masks “will not protect the wearer against airborne transmissible infectious agents due to loose fit and lack of seal or inadequate filtration “ <sup>3</sup>

### **CPS has NOT conducted hazard assessments of Covid-19 risks at CPS schools**

CPS has not conducted the hazard assessments required under Occupational Health and Safety laws or as recommended by the CDC. <sup>4</sup> For example, it has never tested the *air quality* in any of its school buildings.

### **CPS's under-resourced school buildings lack sufficient ventilation and air purification**

CPS has many older buildings that were not designed, or are currently unable, to sufficiently ventilate and purify the air to protect students and staff from airborne Covid-19 infection. CPS's

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago Covid Dashboard (10/1/20). [www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/covid-dashboard.html](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/covid-dashboard.html)

<sup>2</sup> [www.epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-and-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-and-coronavirus-covid-19)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/covid-19-faq.html#cloth-face-coverings](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/covid-19-faq.html#cloth-face-coverings); see also, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/pdfs/UnderstandDifferenceInfographic-508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/pdfs/UnderstandDifferenceInfographic-508.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings* (9/11/20) [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html); Illinois OSHA incorporates the requirements under the federal OSH Act for hazard assessments at 29 C.F.R. 1900.132(d).

oldest school building was built in 1893. 60% of CPS building were built before 1950. And 60% of CPS buildings lack a central HVAC system, and many lack any centralized ventilation system. Due to years of underfunding, over half of CPS buildings have critical air circulation components that are non-operational.

### **CPS has done little or nothing to upgrade its air purification system**

Only 7% of air filters used at CPS meet the industry-recommended standard for air filters rated MERV-13 or higher that remove the virus from the air. If air isn't purified sufficiently with filters or outside air exchanges, the circulation system only spreads the virus throughout the building.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Government continues to recommend remote work where possible**

Though the Government allows limited reopening of businesses and schools, it continues to recommend the employees work remotely wherever possible.

The CDC *Guidance for Business and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019*, (May 2020) recommends that employers “implement flexible worksites (e.g., telework).”<sup>6</sup>

Governor Pritzker’s June 26, 2020 Executive Order 2020-43 recommends that employers of office employees “allow telework where possible,” and that other organizations are “encouraged to facilitate remote work from home when possible”<sup>7</sup>

And the Chicago Department of Public Health also concurs in this assessment. In its recommendation for opening Chicago schools, *Be Safe. PK-12 Education, Chicago (2020)*, CDPH encouraged “Operational resilience and monitoring,” which includes “Flexibility with sick leave and remote work (when possible).”<sup>8</sup>

### **Forcing 400,000 students and staff into CPS school buildings is hazardous to our health**

We cannot succumb to the temptation to reopen schools because our lives may be easier for it. The simple truth is that every time businesses and restaurants reopen, Covid-19 infection rates spike. And CPS is even less prepared to reopen than most. Its antiquated buildings are barely functional and do not provide the necessary air filtration and ventilation necessary for safety.

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<sup>5</sup> See American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), *Guidance for the Re-opening of Schools* (2020), [www.ashrae.org/file%20library/technical%20resources/covid-19/guidance-for-the-re-opening-of-schools.pdf](http://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/technical%20resources/covid-19/guidance-for-the-re-opening-of-schools.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html)

<sup>7</sup> [www2.illinois.gov/Pages/Executive-Orders/ExecutiveOrder2020-43.aspx](http://www2.illinois.gov/Pages/Executive-Orders/ExecutiveOrder2020-43.aspx)

<sup>8</sup> <https://ilmontessori.org/resources/Documents/COVID-19%20-%20Be%20Safe.PK-12-Education-City-of-Chicago-Phase-4-Guidelines.pdf>