



Frequently Asked Questions – Published March 18, 2025

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Sharing What We Know

We understand that the temporary closure of Covington Middle School raised many questions. This FAQ page is designed to answer the most common concerns with the most accurate and up-to-date information we currently have available.

If you don't see your question answered, please use the form below to reach out – we're here to help.

<https://vimeo.com/1065285995/d17f325041>

School Closure and Reopening:

When will Covington Middle School reopen for in-person learning?



We were thrilled to welcome students and staff back to Covington Middle School on Tuesday, March 18. Teachers and staff returned a day earlier on March 17th for a no-student teacher work day.

Why was the school closed for so long?

Our number one priority is, and has always been, student and staff safety. After detecting an odor in the building on January 31, 2025, we followed standard safety procedures and custodial

staff responded. When the source of the odor could not be identified additional AHPS maintenance staff arrived onsite to further investigate. When this group also could not identify the source of the issue, a decision was made to evacuate the school as a precautionary measure.

While initial tests showed no immediate hazards, further investigation through that first weekend identified issues with a kitchen oven and ventilation system (hood), which were promptly removed and repaired respectively.

However, because the location of the malfunctioning equipment was relatively far from the third-floor odor reports that triggered the original investigation, school leaders decided to act out of an abundance of caution and investigate further. The Virginia Department of Health endorsed this decision.

Engaging additional vendors took time as did the methodical nature of the necessary testing and analysis processes. The school system made additional use of this closure and took time to conduct deep cleaning, install new carbon monoxide detectors throughout the building, and address additional maintenance tasks as recommended.

Why didn't students return to school immediately after the oven issue was addressed?

Because the location of the malfunctioning equipment was relatively far from the third-floor odor reports that triggered the original investigation, school leaders decided to act out of an abundance of caution and investigate further.

Additionally, there was an active spread of seasonal norovirus and flu in the school building at the time of the incident.

Engaging additional vendors took time as did the iterative and methodical nature of their comprehensive testing protocols. The decision to extend virtual learning allowed for:

- Additional environmental testing and expert evaluations
- Repairs and improvements to mechanical and ventilation systems
- A deep cleaning of the entire school interior

While we recognize this extended closure was inconvenient, it was also a necessary step to protect our school community and provide CMS families and the broader community with the necessary confidence in a safe return.

Will students receive any additional support as they transition back to in-person learning?



Absolutely. We understand that the extended closure may have been disruptive, so we are prioritizing student well-being as we return.

AHPS already offers Varsity Tutors in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education. The service is offered free of charge and students can reach out for assistance from home. If you are interested in leveraging this resource, contact your child's school. We are also working with the state to determine the best way to optimize our instructional hours and will provide additional updates and offer additional enrichment and optional summer learning opportunity details in the coming weeks.

What if I still have concerns or questions?



AHPS remains committed to open communication with our community and if you have questions, concerns, or feedback, want to hear from you. Please use the form below or our ahpsinfo@ahps.k12.va.us email to communicate with administration.

Additionally, we invite the community to attend the next School Board Meeting on March 17, at the Central Office where we will address the return to school plan and provide final updates before welcoming CMS students back on Tuesday morning.

Health and Safety Measures:

Are we confident the building is safe for students and staff to return?



Yes. Multiple rounds of environmental testing have been conducted by independent experts, and all results confirm that Covington Middle School is ready for reentry. In addition to replacing and repairing equipment that was not operating properly we have:

- Installed new carbon monoxide detectors throughout the building.
- Repaired and improved ventilation systems for better airflow
- Performed a deep cleaning to ensure a fresh and healthy environment
- Consulted with local and state health officials to

verify all safety standards are met

Our school and district leadership, alongside safety professionals, have taken every known precaution to ensure a healthy and happy return for students, teachers, and staff who remain are our top priority.

What tests and evaluations were done during the closure?

To ensure Covington Middle School met all expected standards for students and staff to return, we partnered with multiple independent experts and state agencies to conduct a comprehensive series of tests and evaluations.

These assessments included:

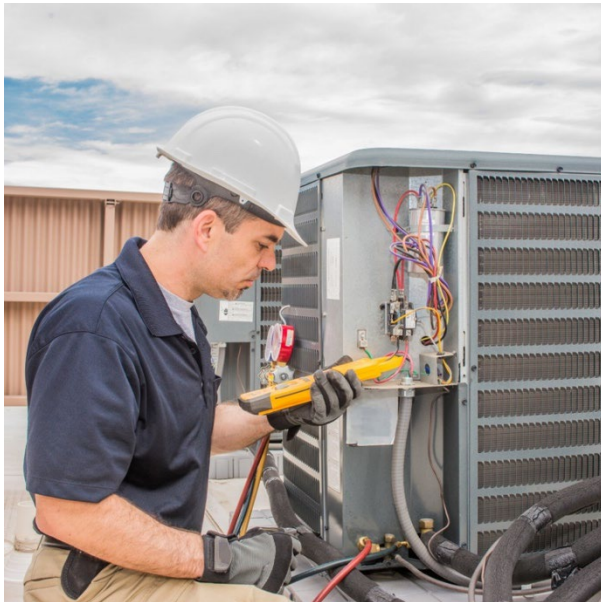
- Air Quality Testing – Multiple rounds of testing were performed throughout the building to measure carbon monoxide levels, ventilation effectiveness, and overall indoor air quality.
- Environmental Assessments – Specialists inspected for any potential contaminants or environmental factors that could have contributed to reported symptoms.
- Mechanical & Ventilation System Inspections – Engineers and HVAC professionals evaluated and repaired the building’s ventilation system, exhaust fans, and other critical infrastructure to ensure optimal airflow.
- Structural & Safety Reviews – The Covington Fire Department, Building Inspectors, and Emergency Management teams walked through the facility to confirm that all systems were functioning properly.
- Health & Safety Consultations – The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) provided guidance on medical concerns regarding carbon monoxide exposure.

Why did the inspections and evaluations take so long?



The concerns that were raised in late January were serious in nature. Ensuring leadership and community confidence in the safety of Covington Middle School required a thorough and methodical approach as well as the support of multiple specialized agencies. While initial air quality tests showed no immediate hazards, the nature of the reported symptoms and concerns meant we needed to take a number of methodical steps before the School Board could make a fully informed decision about reopening. Rather than making a rushed decision to return, the district followed a methodical process of elimination to rule out potential risks related to these concerns.

Who conducted the evaluations to ensure the building is ready to reopen?



Several independent experts and agencies conducted assessments of Covington Middle School, including:

- Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)
- Roanoke Valley Regional Hazardous Materials Team (HazMat)
- Virginia Department of Health (VDH)
- Covington Emergency Services & Fire Department as well as many other local emergency response partners
- ECS Mid-Atlantic, LLC (ECS)
- Facility Dynamics Engineering (FDE)

Each of these organizations brought subject matter specific expertise to the effort and helped us thoroughly evaluate air quality,

ventilation, and environmental safety. The results from these assessments confirmed that there are no ongoing hazards, and the school is now fully cleared for reopening.

What additional testing and monitoring can we expect now that students have returned to school?

AHPS is planning to do an additional independent air quality assessment now that the building is occupied. Additional details on this plan will be forthcoming. AHPS has also purchased a Portable Q-Trak Machine that will allow for ongoing monitoring of building temperature, humidity, Carbon Monoxide, and Carbon Dioxide throughout all school buildings. Finally, carbon monoxide detectors have been installed in every classroom and throughout the buildings shared spaces to allow students, teachers, and staff extra assurance and situational awareness moving forward.

Understanding Carbon Monoxide:

What is carbon monoxide?

According to the US Center for Disease Control (CDC), Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled in sufficient quantities. You can read more about carbon monoxide exposure concerns on their website at <https://www.cdc.gov/carbon-monoxide/about/index.html>.



What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure?



The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. CO symptoms are often described as “flu-like.” CO can be found in small amounts the air. However, breathing in a lot of CO, can make someone pass out or can even be fatal. People who are sleeping or drunk can die from CO poisoning before they experience symptoms. Carbon Monoxide exposure can be detected with a blood test that looks for elevated carboxyhemoglobin levels.

It’s important to note that elevated carboxyhemoglobin levels can also result from many different sources, including smoking, exposure to vehicle exhaust, and even

secondhand smoke.

Were there reports of these symptoms?

Yes, there were reports of some students and staff experiencing these systems. What make this situation especially complicated is that these same symptoms often overlap with other known winter illnesses that are more commonly found in schools, like flu, norovirus, and similar.

How can I prevent carbon monoxide exposure?

Carbon monoxide is commonly found in trace amounts in indoor air (less than 30 parts per million under regular conditions – Sciencedirect.com). Elevated exposure can happen in homes, offices, and other enclosed spaces. You can help keep yourself safe from elevated exposures with the following safety measures:

- Install carbon monoxide detectors in your home and test them regularly.
- Ensure proper ventilation for gas appliances.
- Have heating systems, stoves, and chimneys inspected annually.
- Never run a vehicle, generator, or grill in an enclosed space.
- If you suspect CO exposure, move to fresh air immediately and call 911.

For more information, visit the Virginia Department of Health’s website or contact the Blue Ridge Poison Center at 1-800-451-1428.

Additional Resources:

- [Norovirus vs Carbon Monoxide Poisoning](#)
- [Blue Ridge Poison Control](#)
- [Carbon Monoxide Education Video](#)
- [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- [Johns Hopkins Information on Carbon Monoxide Poisoning](#)

- [Johns Hopkins Information on Norovirus](#)
- [Online Tutoring Services](#)