



K-12 Schools Interim Guidance for Management of COVID-19 Cases

This guidance is intended for K-12 schools to plan their response to known and possible cases of COVID-19 as well as known contacts. This is based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and will be updated as more information and guidance become available. (*Information updated since last guidance provided in italics*).

Definitions

Isolation: Isolation is used to separate people infected with the virus (those who are sick with COVID-19 and those with no symptoms) from people who are not infected. They must remain at home or the place they were told to isolate and avoid contact with other people until their isolation period is over. This includes avoiding contact with those in their household as much as possible.

Quarantine: Quarantine is used to separate people who are close contacts of someone with a contagious disease, like COVID-19, from others for a period of time to see if they become sick. This is a method to prevent the spread of disease. When someone is quarantining, they should stay home and avoid contact with other people until the quarantine period is over. This includes people in their household as much as it is possible.

Close contact: Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) from 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or specimen collection for an asymptomatic infected person) of the infected person.

Student close contact: students within 3 feet of an infected student for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period from 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or specimen collection for an asymptomatic infected person) of the infected student.

Contact tracing: The practice of identifying, notifying, and monitoring individuals who may have had close contact with a person determined to be a confirmed or probable case of an infectious disease as a means of controlling the spread of infection.

Fully vaccinated: A person is considered fully vaccinated, ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine.

Diagnostic Testing: The use of viral (antigen or PCR) COVID-19 tests to determine if an individual with symptoms compatible with COVID-19 is currently infected with SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Screening: Routine, typically performed at least once weekly, viral (PCR or antigen) testing of asymptomatic individuals in order to identify asymptomatic individuals infected with SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Rapid Test: A test (antigen or PCR) that is administered and processed within the same day on premise without sending to another location for processing. Results are typically processed and available within several minutes.

OTC: Over the Counter Use – a medical product approved for use at home without need of a medical professional and without a prescription.

PPE: Personal protective equipment that includes but is not limited to medical grade gloves, face masks, N-95 Respirators, face shields, and gowns.

Prevention strategies: Actions taken to help reduce the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Preparation for COVID Cases in the School

Schools should identify a room that is available to be used for the purpose of isolating students or staff who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 during the school day.

- Students and staff should be moved safely, respectfully, as well as in accordance with any applicable privacy laws or regulations, to the isolation room for evaluation. The individual will be provided a mask which they must wear if they are able to use one, and students should be supervised by a staff member who maintains at least six feet of distance and uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) if available.
- School nurses and other healthcare providers should use [Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions](#) when caring for sick people. See: What Healthcare Personnel Should Know About [Caring for Patients with Confirmed or Possible COVID19 Infection](#).
- *Health rooms and isolation rooms should be treated as healthcare setting and are classified differently than other school settings when establishing preventive actions within schools.*

Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 (but no known exposures to COVID-19)

Individuals should be excluded from school if they have any of the following with or without fever:

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing -or -
- Loss of taste or smell -or –
- New or worsening cough

If these symptoms are explainable by an underlying condition (such as shortness of breath for an individual with asthma) exclusion may not be necessary.

This is not a complete list of all symptoms of COVID-19, but only those that should trigger an automatic exclusion and evaluation for COVID-19. Other symptoms may include fever, chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea/vomiting, or diarrhea. A person is able to spread the virus up to two (2) days before they have any symptoms, but many COVID-19 cases show no symptoms at all.

Given the overlap of COVID-19 symptoms with other more common illnesses and the lack of symptoms in many cases, it is not possible to identify and exclude all cases of COVID-19 through [screening of symptoms](#). Careful prevention strategies within the school are needed to reduce the chances of spread.

COVID Case in School

CDC picture: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/schools-childcare/What-Do-I-Do-Student-Sick-At-School-Flowchart-print.pdf>

- Isolation is required for all cases of COVID-19.
- Enforce that staff and students disclose and stay at home or go home if:
 - They are showing COVID-19 symptoms, until they meet criteria for return described in the table below
 - They have tested positive for COVID-19, until they meet criteria for return described in the table below
- If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, they could have been contagious with the virus up to 48 hours before their symptoms began or before their test specimen was collected (for those with no symptoms).
- Quarantine is required for an individual who has been a close contact (within 3 feet for students or 6 feet for adults, for at least 15 minutes cumulatively over a 24-hour period) of someone who is determined positive with COVID-19 either through testing or symptom consistent diagnosis, with the following two exceptions:
 - Individuals who are fully vaccinated and do not have symptoms do NOT need to quarantine after a close contact.
 - People who have tested positive (PCR or antigen test) for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered and do not have symptoms do NOT need to quarantine.
- CDC continues to recommend quarantine for 14 days after last exposure. However, there are options to reduce the duration of quarantine in either of the following two scenarios:
 - 10 days of quarantine have been completed and no symptoms have been reported during daily at home monitoring.
 - 7 days of quarantine have been completed, no symptoms have been reported during daily at home monitoring, and the individual has received results of a negative antigen or PCR/molecular test that was taken no earlier than day 5 of quarantine.
 - A close contact who is ending quarantine early (less than 14 days) and returning to the school environment should wear a mask and follow physical distancing guidelines in order to return to in-person learning. The individual should also continue to monitor for symptoms through 14 days after the date of last exposure.
- Report to Regional DHEC health authorities any COVID-19 cases among children and staff who were contagious with COVID-19 while on campus or attending an official campus event using established reporting processes.
- The following information is requested when reporting a COVID-19 case:
 - Name
 - Date of birth
 - Address
 - Whether they are a student or staff member
 - Contact information – phone number for staff or parent/guardian name and phone number for students
 - Location and date of test, if known
- DHEC will also notify schools of any reported cases that may have been contagious while on campus.
- Schools that are conducting school-based testing (e.g., BinaxNOW) should refer to that guidance for reporting information.

- All close contacts at the school will need to be identified. Close contacts of COVID-19 cases in schools do not need to be reported to DHEC.
- If 3 or more COVID-19 cases are identified within a classroom or other cohort of students (e.g. sports team or extracurricular group) within fourteen (14) days of each other, consideration should be given to excluding all students and staff, who have not voluntarily provided evidence of vaccination, in the classroom (or cohort of students) for fourteen (14) days after contact with the last identified COVID-19 case. These cases should be reported to the regional DHEC health authorities using established reporting process.
- The classroom (or room used by the cohort of students) may need to be closed for cleaning and disinfection before use again.

Adhere to the following criteria for allowing a student or staff member to return to school:

	Scenario	Criteria to return to school
Asymptomatic Diagnosis	Person has tested positive with an <u>antigen test</u> but does not have symptoms of COVID-19 and is not known to be a close contact to someone diagnosed with COVID-19.	If the person has a repeat PCR/molecular test performed within 24 – 48 hours of their positive antigen test, and that PCR/molecular test is negative: the positive antigen test can be considered a false positive and the person can immediately return to school; OR If the person does not have a repeat PCR/molecular test or has one within 24 – 48 hours and it is also positive, the person can return to school 10 days after the first positive test, as long as they did not develop symptoms. The person is not required to have documentation of a negative test in order to return to school.
Asymptomatic Diagnosis	Person has tested positive with a <u>PCR/molecular test</u> , but the person does not have symptoms.	Person can return to school 10 days after their positive test.
Symptomatic (no close contact)	Person has symptoms of COVID-19 and has tested positive with an antigen test or PCR/molecular test.	Person can return to school when <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been 10 days since the first day of symptoms; AND • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving. The person is not required to have documentation of a negative test in order to return to school.

<p>Symptomatic (no close contact)</p>	<p>Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been tested for COVID-19 nor has visited a health care provider. Therefore, the person who has symptoms is presumed positive for COVID-19 due to the presence of a clinically compatible illness in the absence of testing.</p>	<p>Person can return to school when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been 10 days since the first day of symptoms; AND • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.
<p>Symptomatic (no close contact)</p>	<p>Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has received a negative test for COVID-19* or has visited a health care provider and received an <u>alternate diagnosis</u> that would explain the symptoms of COVID-19. *In a person with symptoms, a negative test is defined as either (1) a negative PCR/molecular test or (2) a negative antigen test if the person has a low likelihood of SARS-CoV-2 infection (e.g., the person has no known or suspected exposure to a person with COVID-19 within the last 14 days or is fully vaccinated or has had a SARS-CoV-2 infection in the last 3 months.)</p>	<p>Person can return to school when they meet criteria per DHEC exclusion list and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • They have felt well for at least 24 hours. Note: The health care provider is not required to detail the specifics of the alternate diagnosis.
<p>Close Contact (asymptomatic)</p>	<p>Person who is not fully vaccinated and has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.</p>	<p>Person can return to school after completing up to 14 days of quarantine. The 14 days of quarantine begin after the last known close contact with the COVID-19 positive individual. Alternatively, if the school offers a shortened quarantine, the person may complete a 10-day quarantine if the person is not presenting symptoms of COVID-19 after daily at-home monitoring, or they may complete 7 days of quarantine if they report no symptoms during daily at-home monitoring, and the individual has received results of a negative antigen or PCR/molecular test on a test taken no earlier than day 5 of quarantine. If quarantine is discontinued before day 14, the individual should continue to monitor symptoms and strictly adhere to all non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g. wear a mask,</p>

		practice social distancing) through 14 days after the date of last exposure.
Close Contact (asymptomatic)	Person who is fully vaccinated and <u>does not</u> have any symptoms after a close contact with someone with COVID-19.	Person does not need to quarantine if they voluntarily choose to provide documentation of their full vaccination status to eliminate the need for quarantine. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended to get tested 3-5 days after exposure. • It is important for them to wear a mask at school until 14 days after exposure or until they receive a negative test result.
Close Contact (asymptomatic)	Person who has tested positive (positive PCR or antigen test) for COVID-19 in the last 3 months and <u>does not</u> have symptoms after a close contact with someone with COVID-19.	Person must wear a mask at all times while in the school, monitor for symptoms daily and throughout the day, practice social distancing to the extent possible, practice good hand hygiene, and clean frequently touched surfaces often until 14 days after exposure.
Close Contact (symptomatic)	Person who has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, who develops symptoms while in quarantine and has no other <u>alternate diagnosis</u> to explain the symptoms. This applies to vaccinated or unvaccinated individuals. *If an alternate diagnosis has been determined, refer to the above close contact guidance based on vaccine/previously infected status.	Person can return to school when <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been 10 days since the first day of symptoms; AND • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

Staff working while in quarantine

- To limit the chances of COVID-19 spread in the facility, staff should plan to quarantine at home and not return to work after close contact to someone contagious with COVID-19.
- Fully vaccinated staff who were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 but do **not** have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine unless they develop symptoms.
 - Individuals may voluntarily choose to provide documentation of their full vaccination status to eliminate the need for quarantine.
 - Fully vaccinated people are recommended to get tested 3-5 days after exposure, even if they do not have symptoms. If fully vaccinated people test negative, they may not need to wear a mask.
 - These individuals should also continue to monitor for symptoms daily and throughout the day, practice social distancing to the extent possible, practice good hand hygiene, and clean frequently touched surfaces often until 14 days after exposure.

- Staff verified (positive PCR or antigen test) to have been infected with COVID-19 in the previous 90 days who were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 but do **not** have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine unless they develop symptoms.
 - Those individuals who have been previously infected with COVID-19 within the previous 90 days who remain at school during quarantine, must wear a mask at all times while in the school, monitor for symptoms daily and throughout the day, practice social distancing to the extent possible, practice good hand hygiene, and clean frequently touched surfaces often until 14 days after exposure.

Resources

[DHEC School Operations Guidance](#)

[DHEC School Exclusion List](#)

[CDC School Guidance](#)

[DHEC List of Reportable Conditions](#)