



## COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools

**Updated January 19, 2022**

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19 and is subject to change as additional information becomes available. The following recommendations should be used by local health departments to aid schools in developing a layered prevention strategy to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Schools should implement as many layers as feasible, although the absence of one or more of the strategies outlined in this document does not preclude the opening or reopening of a school facility for full-day in-person operation with all enrolled students and staff present.

Although COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and accessible, most K-12 schools will have a mixed population of individuals who are vaccinated and individuals not vaccinated, thereby requiring preventative measures to protect all individuals.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), everyone 5 years and older who receives their primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine is considered fully vaccinated.

For children 5 through 17 years of age, a primary series consists of 2 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. For persons 18 and older, a primary series consists of:

- A 2-dose series of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or
- A single-dose COVID-19 vaccine (Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine)

CDC recommends that people remain up to date with their vaccines, which includes [additional doses](#) for individuals who are immunocompromised or [booster doses](#) at regular time points. Individuals who are [moderately or severely immunocompromised](#) should get an additional primary shot and a booster shot.

If schools are unable to determine the vaccination status of individual students or staff, those individuals should be considered not fully vaccinated.

***This guidance document outlines NJDOH COVID-19 public health recommendations for school settings and is intended for use by local health departments (LHDs). This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19 and is subject to change as additional information is known. Please check the NJDOH, NJDOE and CDC websites frequently for updates.***

### ***Communication***

School officials and local health departments should maintain close communication with each other to provide information and share resources on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and control measures and to establish procedures for LHD notification and response to COVID-19 illness in school settings.



In accordance with [Executive Directive No. 21-011](#), schools must report weekly student and staff case counts as well as information on student/staff censuses, and the total numbers of students/staff fully vaccinated to NJDOH through the Surveillance for Influenza and COVID-19 (SIC) Module in [CDRSS](#).

In order to enroll for reporting in the SIC module, schools should follow one of the below two options:

1. For existing school users who report ILI/COVID-19 surveillance data into the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS), nothing additional needs to be done. (same login at <https://cdrs.doh.state.nj.us/cdrss/login/loginPage>)
2. For schools who aren't current CDRSS users, go to <https://cdrs.doh.state.nj.us/cdrss/login/loginPage> and under "System Announcements" go to "K-12 Module and Enrollment Training" and follow the instructions to enroll to report your school's data. Email [CDS.CO.V.RPT@doh.nj.gov](mailto:CDS.CO.V.RPT@doh.nj.gov) your completed user agreement.

Understanding that COVID-19 may impact certain areas of the state differently, NJDOH provides information on COVID-19 transmission at the regional level, characterizing community transmission as low (green), moderate (yellow), high (orange), and very high (red). This information will be posted online every week on the [NJDOH CDS COVID-19 website](#) and sent out via New Jersey Local Information Network and Communications System (NJLINCS) to public health and healthcare partners.

## **Masks**

Wearing masks is an important prevention strategy to help slow the spread of COVID-19 when combined with everyday preventive actions and social distancing in public settings.

Masks must be worn indoors by staff, students, and visitors in all situations except as delineated in [EO 251](#). This includes physical education classes, prior to boarding the school bus, while on the bus and until students are completely off the bus.

In general, students or staff do not need to wear masks outdoors, including during outdoor physical education classes or school sports except during days 6-10 after completing a 5-day isolation or quarantine. However, schools may encourage the use of masks during outdoor activities that involve sustained close contact with other individuals or during periods of [high community transmission](#).

The following principles apply to the use of masks in while indoors or on school buses:

- Masks, respirators, and/or barriers generally do not preclude an individual from being identified as a [close contact](#) to a COVID-19 case. (see exception [below](#)). For the purpose of this document, masks and respirators are considered together, and the term "masks" is used.
- Information should be provided to staff and students on proper use, removal, and – for cloth masks - washing. Information about types of masks and respirators, and how to care for them can be found [here](#).
  - The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are tightly woven such as cotton and cotton blends, breathable, and in two or three fabric layers. Masks with exhalation valves or vents, those that use loosely woven fabrics, and ones that do not fit properly are **not recommended**.

- Cloth masks should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled or damp/wet.
- Disposable face masks should be changed daily or when visibly soiled, damp or damaged.
- Students and schools should have additional disposable or cloth masks available for students, teachers, and staff in case a back-up mask is needed (e.g., mask is soiled or lost during the day).
- Clear masks that cover the nose and wrap securely around the face may be considered in certain circumstances including for the teaching of students with disabilities, young students learning to read, or students in English as a second language classes.
- Appropriate and consistent use of masks may be challenging for some individuals, however, mask use is required for all individuals in indoor school settings with the following exceptions:
  - When doing so would inhibit the individual’s health, such as when the individual is exposed to extreme heat indoors;
  - When the individual has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance;
  - When a student’s documented medical condition or disability, as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Educational Plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, precludes use of a face covering;
  - When the individual is under two (2) years of age;
  - When the individual is engaged in activity that cannot physically be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating or drinking, or playing a musical instrument that would be obstructed by a face covering;
  - When the individual is engaged in high-intensity aerobic or anaerobic activity;
  - When a student is participating in high-intensity physical activities during a physical education class in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet from all other individuals; or
  - When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

Further information on mask-wearing in schools can be found at [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#).

Clear masks:

Clear masks that cover the nose and wrap securely around the face may be considered in certain circumstances if they do not cause breathing difficulties or overheating for the wearer. Clear masks are not face shields. CDC does **not** recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for masks because of a lack of evidence of their effectiveness for source control.

Teachers and staff who may consider using clear masks include:

- Those who interact with students or staff who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Teachers of young students learning to read.
- Teachers of students in English as a Second Language classes.
- Teachers of students with disabilities.

## ***Physical Distancing and Cohorting***

Schools should establish policies and implement structural interventions to promote physical distance and small group cohorting. Schools should implement physical distancing recommendations to the maximum degree that allows them to offer full in-person learning. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet in the classroom, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies (i.e., indoor masking, screening testing, cohorting, etc.).

- **Within classrooms**, maintain 3 feet of physical distancing to the greatest extent practicable, combined with masking for all individuals per [EO 251](#).
- **Outside of classrooms** including in hallways, locker rooms, indoor and outdoor physical education settings, and school-sponsored transportation, maintain physical distancing to the greatest extent practicable.
- The CDC recommends a distance of at least 6 feet between students and teachers/staff and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated in all settings.
- As feasible, maintain cohorts or groups of students with dedicated staff who remain together throughout the day, including at recess, lunch times, and while participating in extracurricular activities.
  - Cohorting people who are not fully vaccinated and people who are fully vaccinated into separate cohorts is not recommended. Schools should ensure that cohorting is done in an equitable manner.

For meals offered in cafeterias or other group dining areas, where masks may not be worn, schools should utilize as many layered prevention strategies as feasible to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- Maximizing physical distance as much as possible when moving through the food service line and while eating (especially indoors).
  - Consider alternatives to use of group dining areas such as eating in classrooms or outdoors.
  - Stagger eating times to allow for physical distancing.
  - Maintain students in cohorts and limit mixing between groups if possible.
- Avoiding offering self-serve food options.
- Discouraging students from sharing meals.
- Encouraging routine cleaning between groups.
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces. Surfaces that come in contact with food should be washed, rinsed, and sanitized before and after meals. Given the data regarding COVID-19 transmission, the use of single-use items, such as disposable utensils, is not necessary during meals.

**Identifying opportunities to maximize physical distancing should be prioritized for the following higher-risk scenarios, especially during periods of [high community transmission](#):**

- In common areas, such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
- When masks can't be worn, such as when eating, especially when indoors.
- When masks may be removed, such as during outdoor activities.

- During indoor activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, sports, or exercise.

## ***Sports and Other Activities***

Due to increased exhalation that occurs during physical activity, some sports can put players, coaches, trainers, and others who are not fully vaccinated at [increased risk](#) for getting and spreading COVID-19. Close contact sports and indoor sports are particularly risky. Similar risks might exist for other extracurricular activities, such as band, choir, theater, and school clubs that meet indoors.

Students should refrain from these activities when they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and awaiting testing. Schools are strongly encouraged to use screening testing for student athletes and adults (e.g., coaches, teachers, advisors) who are not fully vaccinated and participate in and support these activities to facilitate safe participation and reduce risk of transmission.

In general, the risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower when playing outdoors than in indoor settings. Coaches and school sports administrators should also consider [specific sport-related risks](#) when developing prevention strategies.

When the COVID-19 risk level of community transmission is High (Orange), schools should carefully consider which activities they determine can continue, based on the individual activity's risks, strategies to reduce those risks, and the ability to ensure compliance with COVID-19 prevention recommendations.

When the COVID-19 risk level of community transmission is Very High (Red), it is recommended that schools:

- Limit participation in extracurricular activities to those students and staff who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccination per [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#)<sup>1</sup> recommendations.
- Conduct COVID-19 screening testing of students and staff, regardless of vaccination status, twice weekly for participation in all extracurricular activities.

When a school is pursuing fully remote learning due to a current outbreak, NJDOH recommends postponing extracurricular activities involving mixing of cohorts (i.e., school sport practices/competitions, clubs, assemblies). If a school has an active outbreak of COVID-19 but remains open for in-person instruction, in consultation with the local health department and based on the public health investigation, some or all school extracurricular activities may need to be postponed until the outbreak is concluded.

## ***Transportation:***

School buses should be considered school property for the purpose of determining the need for mitigation strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Students and staff who have received one COVID-19 vaccine dose can continue to participate in extracurricular activities until such time as subsequent doses are recommended by ACIP.

- [Masks must be worn by all passengers on buses](#), regardless of vaccination status per [CDC's](#) Federal Order.
- If occupancy allows, maximize physical distance between students. To maximize space when distancing, schools may consider seating students from the same household together.
- Open windows in buses and other transportation to improve air circulation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.
- Regularly clean high touch surfaces on school buses at least daily or between uses as much as possible.

For more information about cleaning and disinfecting school buses or other transport vehicles, read CDC's [guidance for bus transit operators \(May 7, 2021\)](#).

### ***Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette***

- Schools should teach and reinforce [handwashing](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and increase monitoring of students and staff.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).
- Encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue if not wearing a mask.
  - Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hand hygiene as outlined above should be performed immediately.
- Have adequate supplies including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, and no-touch trash cans.
- Assist/observe young children to ensure proper handwashing.

### ***Cleaning, Disinfection and Airflow***

Limit use of shared supplies and equipment:

- Ensure adequate supplies (i.e., classroom supplies, equipment) to minimize sharing of high-touch materials or limit use of supplies and equipment by one group of students at a time and clean and disinfect between use.
- Encourage hand hygiene practices between use of shared items.
- Discourage use of shared items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected.

Schools should follow standard procedures for routine [cleaning and disinfecting](#) with an [EPA-registered product for use against SARS-CoV-2](#). This means **at least daily** disinfecting surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.

- If there has been a person with COVID-19 compatible symptoms or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the facility within the last 24 hours, spaces they occupied should be cleaned and disinfected.
- Close off areas used by the person who is sick or positive and do not use those areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.

- Wait as long as possible (at least several hours) before cleaning and disinfection.
- Open doors and windows and use fans or HVAC settings to increase air circulation in the area.
- Use products from [EPA List](#) according to the instructions on the product label.
- Staff cleaning the space should wear a mask and gloves while cleaning and disinfecting.
- Once area has been appropriately disinfected, it can be opened for use.

The effectiveness of alternative surface disinfection methods, such as ultrasonic waves, high intensity UV radiation, and LED blue light against the virus that causes COVID-19 has not been fully established. The use of such methods to clean and disinfect is discouraged at this time.

CDC does not recommend the use of sanitizing tunnels. Currently, there is no evidence that sanitizing tunnels are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Chemicals used in sanitizing tunnels could cause skin, eye, or respiratory irritation or injury.

In most cases, fogging, fumigation, and wide-area or electrostatic spraying is not recommended as a primary method of surface disinfection and has [several safety risks to consider](#).

#### [Airflow:](#)

Improve [airflow](#) to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. This can be achieved through several actions:

- Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
- If safe to do so, open windows and doors. Even just cracking open a window or door helps increase outdoor airflow, which helps reduce the potential concentration of virus particles in the air. If it gets too cold or hot, adjust the thermostat.
- Do not open windows or doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (such as falling, exposure to extreme temperatures, or triggering asthma symptoms), or if doing so would otherwise pose a security risk.
- Use child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows.
  - Safely secure fans in a window to blow potentially contaminated air out and pull new air in through other open windows and doors.
  - Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows. Position fans securely and carefully in/near windows so as not to induce potentially contaminated airflow directly from one person over another (strategic window fan placement in exhaust mode can help draw fresh air into the room via other open windows and doors without generating strong room air currents).
- Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens.
- Consider having activities, classes, or lunches outdoors when circumstances allow.
- Open windows in buses and other transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk. Even just cracking windows open a few inches improves air circulation.

School districts are encouraged to review NJDOH's [Guidance on Air Cleaning Devices for New Jersey Schools](#). See the [NJDOH Environmental Health](#) webpage for [Tips to Improve Indoor Ventilation](#) and [Maintaining Healthy Indoor Air Quality in Public School Buildings](#).

## ***Stay Home When Sick or if Exposed to COVID-19***

Educate staff, students, and their families about when they should stay home and when they should return to school. Students and staff should stay home if they:

- Have tested positive (viral test) for COVID-19.
- Are sick.
- Meet the criteria for [quarantine](#) and have had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19.

While there is no statewide travel advisory or mandate in place at this time, schools are encouraged to have a policy for exclusion for students and staff that travel that is consistent with [CDC COVID-19 travel recommendations](#).

- For those traveling to/from New Jersey, domestic travel is defined as lasting 24 hours or longer to states or US territories other than those connected to New Jersey, such as Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware.
  - [NJ travel recommendations](#)
  - [CDC international travel recommendations](#)
  - [CDC domestic travel recommendations](#)

Siblings who are not fully vaccinated (or meet [criteria for quarantine](#)) of a student who has symptoms and meets [COVID-19 Exclusion](#) criteria should be excluded from school until the symptomatic individual receives a negative test result. If the symptomatic individual tests positive, the sibling will need to quarantine.

## ***Parental Symptom Screening***

Parents/caregivers should be strongly encouraged to monitor their children for signs of illness every day as they are the front line for assessing illness in their children. Students who are sick should **not** attend school in-person. Schools should strictly enforce exclusion criteria for both students and staff.

Schools should consider providing parent education about the importance of monitoring symptoms and staying home while ill through school or district messaging. Using existing outreach systems to provide reminders to staff and families to check for symptoms before leaving for school.

Schools should provide clear and accessible directions to parents/caregivers and students for reporting symptoms and reasons for absences.

## ***Response to Symptomatic Students and Staff***

Schools should ensure that procedures are in place to identify and respond to a student or staff member who becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms.

- Closely monitor daily reports of staff and student attendance/absence and identify when persons are out with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Designate an area or room away from others to isolate individuals who become ill with COVID-19 symptoms while at school.



- Consider an area separate from the nurse's office so the nurse's office can be used for routine visits such as medication administration, injuries, and non-COVID-19 related visits.
- Ensure there is enough space for multiple people placed at least 6 feet apart.
- Ensure that hygiene supplies are available, including additional cloth masks, facial tissues, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- School nurses should use [Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions](#) based on the [care and tasks](#) required.
- Staff assigned to supervise students waiting to be picked up do not need to be healthcare personnel but should follow physical distancing guidelines.
- Follow guidance in [Cleaning, Disinfection and Airflow](#) section.

### [When illness occurs in the school setting](#)

Children and staff with COVID-19 symptoms regardless of vaccination status should be separated away from others until they can be sent home. If a mask is not worn by the ill student due to an exemption or exception described in [EO 251](#), other staff should be sure to adhere to the universal mask policy and follow maximum physical distancing guidelines (6 feet away).

- Ask ill student (or parent) and staff whether they have had potential exposure to COVID-19 meeting the definition of a [close contact](#).
- Individuals should be sent home and referred to a healthcare provider. Persons with [COVID-19-compatible symptoms](#) should undergo COVID-19 testing regardless of vaccination status.
  - If [community transmission is low](#) ill individuals **without potential exposure to COVID-19** should use the [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school. No public health notification is needed UNLESS there is an unusual increase in the number of persons who are ill (over normal levels), which might indicate an outbreak.
  - If ill students have potential COVID-19 exposure OR if [community transmission is moderate or high](#), they should continue to be excluded according to the [COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria](#).
- Schools should notify LHDs when students or staff:
  - Are ill and have potential COVID-19 exposure;
  - When there is an increase in the number of persons with COVID-19 compatible symptoms;
  - Test positive for COVID-19 (when in-school testing is performed).
- Schools should be prepared to provide the following information when consulting with the LHD:
  - Contact information for the ill persons;
  - The date the ill person developed symptoms, tested positive for COVID-19 (if known), and was last in the building;
  - Types of interactions (close contacts, length of contact) the person may have had with other persons in the building or in other locations;
  - Vaccination status of the ill person and the close contacts.
  - Names, addresses, and telephone numbers for ill person's close contacts in the school;
  - Any other information to assist with the determination of next steps.

Regardless of vaccination status, if a student or staff experiences [COVID-compatible symptoms](#), they should [isolate themselves from others](#), be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, and tested for SARS-CoV-2.

### **Exclusion**

Parents should not send students to school when sick. For school settings, NJDOH recommends that students with the following symptoms be promptly isolated from others and excluded from school:

- At least **two** of the following symptoms: fever (measure or subjective), chills, rigors (shivers), myalgia (muscle aches), headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, congestion or runny nose; **OR**
- At least **one** of the following symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, new olfactory disorder, new taste disorder.

**For students with chronic illness, only new symptoms, or symptoms worse than baseline should be used to fulfill symptom-based exclusion criteria.**

On January 4, 2022, CDC updated [COVID-19 isolation and quarantine recommendations](#) with shorter isolation (for asymptomatic infected and mildly ill people) and quarantine periods of 5 days to focus on the period when a person is most infectious (followed by continued masking for an additional 5 days). Individuals who are unable to wear a mask should be excluded until after at least 10 days and continue to isolate/quarantine.

CDC has released [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) guidance for K-12 schools. Additional updated information for K-12 schools can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

### **COVID-19 exclusion (isolation) criteria for persons who have COVID-19 compatible symptoms or who test positive for COVID-19:**

Individuals regardless of vaccination status, who test positive or individuals with COVID-19 symptoms who have not been tested and do not have an alternative diagnosis from their healthcare provider should:

- Stay home for at least 5 full days after the onset of symptoms or if asymptomatic after the positive test (day of symptoms is day 0; if asymptomatic, day the test was performed is day 0).
- If they have no symptoms or symptoms are resolving after 5 days and are fever-free (without the use of fever-reducing medication) for 24 hours, they can leave their home and should;
  - Wear a mask when around others at home and in public (indoors and outdoors) for an additional 5 days. For these additional 5 days, schools should have a plan to ensure adequate distance during those activities (i.e., eating) when mask wearing is not possible. Time without mask being worn should be kept to minimum possible.
  - On days 6-10, limit participation in extracurricular activities to only those activities where masks can be worn consistently and correctly.

**Exception:** During periods of low community transmission (green), ill individuals with COVID-19 compatible symptoms who are not tested **and do not have a known COVID-19 exposure** may follow [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school.

CDC recommends an isolation period of at least 10 and up to 20 days for people who were severely ill with COVID-19 and for [people with weakened immune systems](#). See [Overview of COVID-19 Isolation for K-12 Schools](#) for additional details.

*Individuals with an alternative diagnosis:*

Evaluation by a health care provider may be necessary to differentiate between COVID-19 and alternative diagnoses. Clinical evaluation and/or testing for COVID-19 may be considered for ANY of the symptoms listed above, depending on suspicion of illness from a health care provider. Testing is strongly recommended, especially when there are multiple unlinked cases in the school and during periods of moderate and high levels of community transmission.

Individuals with COVID-19 compatible symptoms **and no known exposure** to a COVID-19 case in the last 5 days, regardless of vaccination status, may follow the [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school **only if they have an alternative diagnosis (i.e., strep throat, influenza, worsening of chronic illness) supported by clinical evaluation.**

**Exception:** During periods of low community transmission (green), ill individuals with COVID-19 compatible symptoms who are not tested **and do not have a known COVID-19 exposure** may follow [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school.

The [COVID-19 Exclusion Table](#) below can be used to determine the need for and duration of school exclusion. In order to facilitate rapid diagnosis and limit unnecessary school exclusion, schools may consider implementing school-based [diagnostic testing](#) for students and staff.

**COVID-19 exclusion criteria for close contacts (quarantine) guidance:**

Exposed close contacts who have no COVID-19 compatible symptoms in the following groups should be excluded from school:

- Age 12 or older who completed the [primary series](#) of a recommended COVID-19 vaccine, but have not received a [recommended](#) booster shot when eligible.
- Persons who are not [fully vaccinated](#).

**Exception – schools who are using a “[Test to Stay](#)” protocol may allow asymptomatic close contacts to return to in-person academic activities immediately so long as the contacts follow the protocol.**

For determining a school-based close contact to a COVID-19 case:

- Individuals would be considered exposed during the period between 2 days prior to symptom onset (or positive test date if asymptomatic) and 5 days after.
- Individuals would NOT be considered exposed during the case’s additional precaution period at day 6-10).

During quarantine, students and staff should follow recommendations and additional precautions outlined in DOH [Recommended Isolation and Quarantine Timeframes for Non-Healthcare Settings](#) regarding staying home, travel, and testing.

Exposed close contacts who have no COVID-19 symptoms in the following groups do not need to be excluded from school:

- Age 12 or older and have received all [recommended vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people.
- Age 5-11 years and completed the [primary series](#) of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days (tested positive using a [viral test](#)).

*To allow time for students to catch up with the latest recommendations and to minimize disruption to in-person learning, schools may wait until February 1, 2022 to implement school exclusion for students ages 12-17 years who completed their primary vaccine series but have not yet received all eligible boosters.*

Everyone should:

- Wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others for 10 days from the date of their last close contact with someone with COVID-19 (the date of last close contact is considered day 0).
- Get tested at least 5 days after having close contact with someone with COVID-19 unless they had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days and subsequently recovered.
- Monitor for fever (100.4°F or greater), cough, shortness of breath, or other COVID-19 symptoms for 10 days after their last exposure.
- On days 6 through 10, limit participation in extracurricular activities to only those activities where masks can be worn consistently and correctly.

If any close contact experiences symptoms (regardless of vaccination status), they should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated if indicated, and get tested for COVID-19.

#### **Exceptions for household contacts:**

In all risk levels, students and staff who meet the [criteria for quarantine](#) and who are household members of a student/staff member with COVID-19 compatible symptoms that meets [COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria](#) should be excluded from school until the symptomatic individual receives a negative test result. If the ill person is not tested but an alternative diagnosis is established after clinical evaluation, household contacts can return to school.

Household contacts who can't isolate away from a household member with COVID-19 should start their quarantine period on the day after the household member would have completed their 10-day isolation period, UNLESS the household member is able to consistently wear a well fitted mask in the household through day 10, in which case the quarantine period would start on the day after the household member completes their 5-day isolation period.

**In response to symptomatic students who have not undergone testing AND who have no known exposure to COVID-19, schools should not identify and exclude their close contacts from school. COVID-19 testing is strongly encouraged so this determination can be made.**

**Schools serving medically complex or other high-risk individuals should use a 10-day exclusion period for the exclusion of these individuals or those who work closely with them when identified as close contacts.**

**Exclusion criteria for persons with COVID-19, COVID-19 compatible symptoms and close contacts who meet criteria for quarantine<sup>1</sup>**

	Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk	Very High Risk
<b>COVID-19 positive</b> (viral test), symptomatic or asymptomatic	Exclude according to <a href="#">COVID-19 exclusion criteria</a>  Identify and exclude unvaccinated school based close contacts			
<b>COVID-19 - compatible symptoms but not tested for COVID-19</b>	If no potential exposure to a COVID-19 case in the last 5 days, individual can follow <a href="#">NJDOH School Exclusion List</a>  If person has potential exposure to COVID-19 in the last 5 days, exclude according to <a href="#">COVID-19 exclusion criteria</a>	If no potential exposure to a COVID-19 case in the last 5 days AND has an alternative diagnosis from a healthcare provider, follow <a href="#">NJDOH School Exclusion List</a>  If no potential exposure to a COVID-19 case in the last 5 days but without an alternative diagnosis from a healthcare provider, exclude according to <a href="#">COVID-19 exclusion criteria</a>  If person has potential exposure to COVID-19 in the last 5 days, exclude according to <a href="#">COVID-19 exclusion criteria</a>		
<b>COVID-19 - compatible symptoms and negative COVID-19 test</b> (viral test)	Follow <a href="#">NJDOH School Exclusion List</a>  Symptomatic individuals with high likelihood of COVID-19 (i.e., who are close contacts of a confirmed case or who have had suspected exposure to a person with COVID-19 AND who meet the <a href="#">criteria for quarantine</a> AND have not had COVID-19 in the past 3 months) who test negative by rapid antigen test should undergo confirmatory testing with molecular test (i.e. RT-PCR).			
<b>Close contact</b> of staff or student with COVID-19 <sup>2,3</sup>	Close contacts who meet the <a href="#">criteria for quarantine</a> should be excluded for 5 days <sup>4</sup> from date of last contact.			

*1. In all risk levels, students and staff who meet the [criteria for quarantine](#) and who are household members of a student/staff member with COVID-19 compatible symptoms that meets [COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria](#) should be excluded from school until the symptomatic individual receives a negative test result. If the symptomatic individual tests positive, the household member will need to quarantine.*

*2. Persons who do not meet the [criteria for quarantine](#) who have close contact with someone with COVID-19 do NOT need to be excluded from school if they are asymptomatic but should be referred for testing 5 days after last close contact.*

*3. Individuals who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 90 days who have close contact with someone with COVID-19 and are asymptomatic do NOT need to be excluded from school and do not need to be tested.*

*4. Continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around others at home and in public (indoors and outdoors) for the full 10 days after the last close contact.*

## Outbreaks

Schools must report single cases to their local health department. LHDs will work with schools to determine if there is an outbreak. An outbreak in a school setting is defined as three or more laboratory-confirmed (by RT-PCR or antigen) COVID-19 cases among students or staff with onsets within a 14-day period, who are epidemiologically linked<sup>2</sup>, do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing.

If an outbreak has been identified, schools and local health departments should promptly intervene to control spread while working to determine whether the outbreak originated in the school setting.

During an outbreak, schools may consider a temporary transition of affected cohorts to remote learning if a high number of cases is preventing timely contact tracing and exclusion and a short-term transition to remote learning is needed to allow for such actions to occur.

Decisions to transition cohorts to remote learning should be made by schools based on their individual circumstances in conjunction with LHDs.

## Contact Tracing and Notification

Contact tracing is a strategy used to determine the source of an infection and how it is spreading. Finding people who are close contacts to a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, and therefore at higher risk of becoming infected themselves, can help prevent further spread of the virus.

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*Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with suspected or known COVID-19 for 15 or more minutes during a 24-hour period. In certain situations, it may be difficult to determine whether individuals have met this criterion and an entire cohort, classroom, or other group may need to be considered exposed.*

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**Exception:** In the **K–12 indoor classroom** setting or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with educator supervision), the close contact definition **excludes students** who were within **3 to 6 feet of an infected student** (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinically compatible illness](#)) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.

**This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.**

School staff should identify school-based close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases in the school.

- As with any other communicable disease outbreak, schools will assist in identifying the close contacts within the school and communicating this information back to the LHD.

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<sup>2</sup> Health departments should verify to the best extent possible that cases were present in the same setting during the same time period (e.g., same classroom, school event, school-based extracurricular activity, school transportation) within 14 days prior to onset date (if symptomatic) or specimen collection date for the first specimen that tested positive (if asymptomatic or onset date is unknown) and that there is no other more likely source of exposure (e.g., household or close contact to a confirmed case outside of educational setting).

- With guidance from the LHD, schools will be responsible for notifying parents and staff of the close contact exposure and exclusion requirements while maintaining confidentiality.
- The LHD contact tracing team will notify and interview the close contacts identified by the school and reinforce the exclusion requirements.

Customizable contact tracing notification letters can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-contact-tracing/letters.html>

The NJDOH isolation and quarantine calculator can be found at <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/quarantine-calculator>.

## **Testing**

When schools implement testing combined with key mitigation strategies, they can detect new cases to prevent outbreaks, reduce the risk of further transmission, and protect students, teachers, and staff from COVID-19. This guidance can assist districts as they craft policies for compliance with staff testing as required by [EO 253](#).

In some schools, school-based healthcare professionals (e.g., school nurses) may perform SARS-CoV-2 antigen testing in school-based health centers if they are trained in specimen collection, conducting the test per manufacturer’s instructions, and obtain a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certificate of waiver. Some school-based healthcare professionals may also be able to perform specimen collection to send to a lab for testing, if trained in specimen collection, without a CLIA certificate. It is important that school-based healthcare professionals have access to, and training on the proper use of [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#).

Any healthcare provider or laboratory performing COVID-19 testing, including K-12 schools, are required to report all COVID-19 laboratory test results, both positive and negative, electronically to NJDOH. Laboratories are required to report test results into the NJDOH Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS). Access to CDRSS requires the completion of training available on the [CDRSS home page](#). Healthcare providers, including schools, can report into CDRSS or through [SimpleReport](#). Refer to [Guidance for Schools on COVID-19 Reporting Requirements, Reporting Point of Care \(POC\) COVID-19 Test Results, and Screening Testing Program](#).

### *[Diagnostic Testing:](#)*

At all levels of [community transmission](#), NJDOH recommends that schools work with their local health departments to identify rapid viral testing options in their community for the testing of symptomatic individuals and asymptomatic individuals who were exposed to someone with COVID-19. Having access to [rapid COVID-19 testing for ill students and staff](#) can reduce unnecessary exclusion of ill persons and their contacts and minimize unnecessary disruptions of the educational process. Results of all testing – including point of care – must be reported to public health authorities by the entity conducting the testing.

### *[Screening testing:](#)*

Schools should use screening testing as a strategy to identify cases and prevent secondary transmission. Screening testing involves using SARS-CoV-2 viral tests (diagnostic tests used for screening purposes) intended to identify occurrence at the individual level even if there is no reason to suspect infection—i.e., there is no known exposure. This includes, but is not limited to, screening testing of asymptomatic





individuals without known exposure with the intent of making decisions based on the test results. Further information on screening testing is available in [NJDOH screening testing guidelines](#).

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and CDC have made available a [grant program](#) to assist schools with implementing screening testing. Participation in this program is voluntary but strongly encouraged. Schools interested in participating in this program can obtain additional information by emailing [COVID.schooltesting@doh.nj.gov](mailto:COVID.schooltesting@doh.nj.gov).

Developing and implementing a screening testing strategy is particularly important during periods of [high community transmission](#) when physical space limitations prevent the implementation of maximal social distancing practices. Testing strategies in K-12 schools should be developed in consultation with local health departments. Results of all testing – including point of care – must be reported to public health authorities by the entity conducting the testing. In addition to reporting individual test results to public health authorities, schools are encouraged to report aggregate screening testing results, including the number of tests performed, directly to NJDOH through the Surveillance for Influenza and COVID-19 (SIC) Module in [CDRSS](#). Note: Schools participating in the NJDOH grant funded screening testing program and those included as “covered settings” in [NJDOH Executive Directive 21-011](#) are required to report this information. Registration and training for reporting screening testing data can be found at <https://cdrs.doh.state.nj.us/cdrss/common/cdrssTrainingNotes>.

#### *Home-based testing:*

A variety of home-based COVID-19 tests are becoming more widely available. While all involve self-collection of specimens, some test kits require a prescription and others are over-the-counter (OTC). Some collections/testing are observed by a telehealth provider, some involve self-collection but are sent to a laboratory for processing, and others use self-collection and self-testing without any involvement of a healthcare provider. Some home-based tests have been authorized by FDA for screening purposes, others for diagnostic testing.

Information on home-based testing is available at [https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/COVID\\_home\\_tests.pdf](https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/COVID_home_tests.pdf).

## **Resources**

### **CDC**

[Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) Updated January 6, 2022

[What You Should Know About COVID-19 Testing in Schools](#) January 6, 2022

[Responding to COVID-19 Cases in K-12 Schools: Resources for School Administrators](#) January 6, 2022

[Overview of COVID-19 Quarantine for K-12 Schools](#) January 6, 2022

[Overview of COVID-19 Isolation for K-12 Schools](#) January 6, 2022

[Stay Up to Date with Your Vaccines](#) January 5, 2022



[School and Childcare Programs](#)

[Testing for COVID-19 in Schools Toolkit](#)

[Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs](#)

[Parents and Caregivers – What Is Your School Doing to Protect Your Child from COVID-19?](#)

[CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

[CDC Information on Cleaning School Buses](#) (archived updated May 7, 2021)

[Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome \(MIS-C\)](#)

[School Decision-Making Tool for Parents, Caregivers, and Guardians](#)

### **NJDOH**

[NJDOH COVID Information for Schools](#)

[Maintaining Healthy Indoor Air Quality in Public School Buildings](#)

[NJDOH Disinfectant Use in Schools Fact Sheet](#)

[NJDOH Isolation and Quarantine Calculator](#)

[NJDOH General Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Outbreaks in School Settings](#)

[New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub](#)

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

[COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry AAP](#)

[Healthy Children.Org COVID-19](#)

[ArtsEd NJ Scholastic Indoor Performance Guidance](#) (October 14, 2021)

[National Association for Music Education](#)

[Return to Music: Phase II Guidance and Resources](#)