



FAQs for Superintendents

A simple, reliable, and proven solution to keep your schools open and provide peace of mind for teachers and families.

The K-12 Testing Program sponsored by the Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health and the Louisiana Department of Education is a comprehensive turn-key testing solution customized to meet the unique needs of your district and your schools. Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the program.

Why Orion Laboratories?

We are the largest full-service independent CLIA-certified laboratory in the State of Louisiana. Our testing services are used by physicians across dozens of clinical areas, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, prescription drug monitoring, infectious disease, and neurology. During the pandemic, our team provided sample collection, transportation, and COVID-19 testing to colleges and universities, government agencies, public corporations, hospitals and health systems, movie productions, collegiate sports teams, restaurants, and private individuals.

Why should we test for COVID-19 in schools?

Without knowing the specific prevalence of COVID-19 in your classrooms, it's tough to make informed decisions about safeguarding your school community. Because many people are asymptomatic, they may be carrying the COVID-19 virus but may not have any symptoms. Testing will help your schools to identify and isolate infected individuals reducing the need for large scale classroom or whole school quarantines.

How does the testing process work?

We provide everything needed for testing at your school and will work with you and your staff to design and implement a simple process that minimizes disruption. A trained team will visit weekly at a regularly scheduled time to quickly swab each student, teacher, and staff member using short nasal or oral swabs which have proven to

be easier to handle and more comfortable for children and adults. A single team can test an entire class in just minutes using our process and testing can take place in the classroom, at a designated location with a mobile testing cart, or in a central location such as an outdoor area or gym. Test results will be released within 12 – 24 hours of collection.

How reliable is the test?

Our laboratory uses a molecular polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing technology that is considered the “gold standard” to determine if someone has a current COVID-19 infection by targeting regions of three different coronavirus genes (orf-1ab, gene for the S protein, gene for the N protein).

What is pooled testing?

The pooled testing method combines samples from five individuals into one “pooled” sample at our laboratory. If everyone is negative, the lab gives each individual a negative result. If the pool tests positive, we immediately test the individual samples from that pool to see which person is positive before releasing results. This strategy improves turnaround time and reduces the likelihood of unnecessary disruption by confirming each individual sample before releasing results.

What are the consent form requirements?

To participate in testing, participants must sign a consent form. For students under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must provide consent on their behalf. Paper copies can be available, or consent forms can be completed and signed electronically.

Do parents need to complete a consent form every week?

No. Consent forms only need to be completed once for the program

How much time does testing take away from the classroom?

We designed the testing to take up as little class time as possible. It usually takes 8 – 12 minutes to test an entire class for the first time and we will get even more efficient and take less time after the first week. Our staff is trained to balance minimizing disruption with being sensitive to staff and student needs.

How can we view our test results?

You will have access to data for all schools in your district. Principals will have access to data only for their school. We provide access to two real-time dashboards to enable you and your principals to manage the testing of your students and staff:

- Aggregate program information, including the number of samples collected and results
- Detailed test results, including individuals within each pool

How is user privacy ensured?

As a clinical testing provider, Orion adheres to the strictest privacy and security controls. We can offer you detailed information about how we protect our clients' data for you to share with your teachers, parents, and staff.

Is there a potential for false positives?

False positives are possible but very rare. The test utilized by Orion detects three different unique viral RNA templates. For a positive result, at least two RNA templates must be detected. The individual confirmation protocols we have established substantially decrease false positives created by detecting dead viral particles.

What if a test comes back positive?

If an individual tests positive, the district or school must follow up with participants directly to communicate next steps. Next steps will be based on the district's guidelines and any state or local recommendations.

What percentage of the students need to participate?

Every additional student tested reduces the chance of the virus spreading in the school community. As many students as possible should participate. Our clients typically strive to have 70 – 80% participation.

What ages and grade levels can participate in testing?

The test is easy and quick and is conducted with short nasal or oral swabs. Our trained staff has experience collecting samples from ages < 1 year to 102 years. All grade levels from K-12 can participate.

If someone is vaccinated, do they still need to be tested?

It depends on the requirements of the district, but we recommend that everyone be tested. While vaccinated people have a much lower risk of being infected, it is still possible, and testing helps identify those cases.

If someone already had COVID-19, do they still need to be tested?

It depends on the requirements of the district, but we recommend that everyone be tested unless they were infected with COVID-19 within the past 90 days.

How do we register for the testing program?

You should receive information from the Office of Public Health about how to register. Once you have registered, we will schedule a time to come visit with you and your school leaders and will provide you with all the information you need including a toolkit and templates to make sure everything runs smoothly.

