

COVID-19 Contact Tracing in Schools

When a COVID-19 infection is identified among a student or staff member in a school, it is critical to conduct immediate contact tracing and identify all students and staff members who have been in close contact with this person. This should be done individually for each person identified with COVID-19 in the school, including laboratory confirmed and suspect cases (see step 1 below).

Contact tracing slows the spread of COVID-19 by identifying and notifying people that they may have been exposed, asking them to monitor their health, and asking them to self-quarantine. Timely and thorough contact tracing can effectively interrupt the chain of disease transmission and is an important public health intervention that can be layered with other interventions to prevent or contain an outbreak. By keeping those that may have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others, further transmission may be prevented. Contact tracing is also an important component of Test to Stay programs. Additional information about Test to Stay and other quarantine options can be found here: <https://ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Coronavirus/resources/ContactTracing/QuarantineOptions.pdf>.

1. Steps to identify COVID-19 infections and report to LDH

- Identify a person with COVID-19 infection.** A person with COVID-19 infection that would require reporting to LDH and conducting contact tracing is defined as:
 - Laboratory-Confirmed Case: someone who receives a positive COVID-19 viral test result, including PCR or antigen tests. Antibody tests indicate past exposure or vaccination and *should not* be used to diagnose current infection or to initiate contact tracing.

OR

 - Suspect Case:** someone who is experiencing any COVID-like symptom(s) including:
 - Fever or chills, rigors, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

AND

 - No alternative more likely diagnosis
 - If a suspect case subsequently tests negative by PCR test, they can return to school when they are symptom-free for 24 hours and any close contacts that have been quarantined may return to school.
- Isolate and send the person home immediately.** They should not return to school until the following “end of self-isolation criteria” are met. Day 0 is the day symptoms began or the day the person took a test that had a positive result. Day 1 is the day after symptoms began, or if a person does not have symptoms, the day after the person tested positive (use the date the test was collected).
 - Stay home for 5 days.
 - If you have no symptoms or your symptoms are resolving after 5 days, you can return to school.
 - If you continue to have a fever or your other symptoms have not improved after 5 days, you should stay in isolation until you are fever-free for 24 hours

without the use of fever-reducing medication and your other symptoms have improved.

- Continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days.
 - If school cannot ensure masking for 5 additional days, then case should isolate for a full 10 days. This includes children in programs with a nap component where students will be unmasked for an extended period of time.
- Weekly aggregate case counts and outbreaks should be reported to the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) using the online School COVID-19 Reporting Portal.** If you have questions, contact schoolcovidreporting@la.gov. [Regional OPH Offices](#) are available to provide consultation and recommendations upon request.

2. Steps to identify and notify close contacts of persons identified as having COVID-19 infection

- For suspect cases only, quarantining of close contacts may be delayed up to 48 hours after meeting clinical criteria to allow for the return of molecular/PCR test results or an alternative more likely diagnosis to be made by a physician.
 - If a PCR test result or alternative more likely diagnosis is not available within 48 hours of meeting being identified as a suspect case, close contacts should be quarantined as described below.
 - If a PCR test results negative or an alternative more likely diagnosis is made by a physician, close contacts do not need to be quarantined. The symptomatic person should not return to school until they are symptom-free for 24 hours.
- Determine who has been in close contact with suspect and confirmed COVID-19 cases in school during their infectious period.**
 - Close contact is defined as
 - being within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hr period **OR**
 - having direct contact with an infected person, including touching, hugging, kissing, or sharing eating or drinking utensils; or if an infected person sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on another person
 - Exception:** If BOTH the case and the contact were engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting face mask AND were ≥ 3 feet from each other, then those close contacts do not need to quarantine. They should continue to mask while indoors until at least day 10 post-exposure.
 - The infectious period includes the 48 hours before the day the person became sick (or the 48 hours before specimen collection if asymptomatic) until the person was isolated.
 - Use of face shields or plastic dividers are not considered in determining close contacts.
 - Identify close contacts that may have occurred during any time or place the person was at school during the infectious period, including in the classrooms, during recess or lunch, and during extra-curricular activities.
- Notify close contacts of the need to quarantine.**

- Notify all close contacts of suspect and confirmed cases that they have been identified as exposed to someone who is or may be ill with COVID-19 and will need to quarantine. A template letter can be provided to the school by the Office of Public Health.
- **End of Quarantine Criteria:** The last day an individual has close contact with a case is Day 0 of quarantine. Day 1 begins the day after their last close contact.

| | Quarantine Guidance |
|---|---|
| If you were exposed to COVID-19 and are up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccinations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do not need to stay home unless you develop symptoms • Wear a mask around others for 10 days. • Watch for symptoms until 10 days after you last has close contact with someone with COVID-19. • If you develop symptoms, isolate immediately and get tested. Continue to stay home until you know the results. • Test on Day 5, if possible*. If your test result is positive, see isolation guidance above. |
| If you were exposed to COVID-19 and are NOT up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccinations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay home/quarantine for 5 days. After that, return to school but continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days (i.e., through Day 10). • Watch for symptoms until 10 days after you last has close contact with someone with COVID-19. • If you develop symptoms, isolate immediately and get tested. Continue to stay home until you know the results. • Test on Day 5, if possible*. If your test result is positive, see isolation guidance above. |
| If you were exposed to COVID-19 and tested positive with an antigen or PCR test for COVID-19 in the previous 90 days | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do not need to stay home unless you develop symptoms • Watch for symptoms until 10 days after you last has close contact with someone with COVID-19. • If you develop symptoms, isolate immediately and get tested. Continue to stay home until you know the results. • Wear a mask around others for 10 days. |
| <p><i>* Limited availability of diagnostic tests may make it difficult for an asymptomatic individual to find testing. Testing on Day 5 post-exposure is recommended, but is not required for return to school.</i></p> | |

- **Any close contact who develops symptoms should seek testing immediately.**
- **Ensure close contacts who are not up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination remain out of school until the end of their quarantine period.**
- If any close contact becomes symptomatic and tests positive, they would be considered a case as of the day their symptoms began and would need to follow “end of self-isolation criteria” to return to school.

- If any close contact becomes symptomatic but is not tested, they would be considered a case as of the day their symptoms began and would need to follow “end of self-isolation criteria” to return to school or complete their quarantine period, whichever is longer.
- If any close contact tests positive but does not develop symptoms, they would be considered a case as of the day their test was collected and would need to follow “end of self-isolation criteria” to return to school.
- If a close contact has a negative viral test at any point of their quarantine period or period of required masking, they should continue to follow all quarantine and masking guidance.
- If a suspect case tests negative by PCR test, any quarantined close contacts of that suspect case may return to school.
- OPH recommends schools consider notifying the entire school community that there was a person with COVID-19 infection identified and close contacts have been notified.**

3. Steps to conduct cleaning and disinfection according to CDC guidance

- Close off areas used by the persons with COVID-19 and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets
 - Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
 - Wear a mask and gloves while cleaning and disinfecting.
- Clean and disinfect all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the person(s) with COVID-19, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces
 - Surfaces should be cleaned using soap (or a detergent) and water prior to disinfection.
 - For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective against the virus that causes COVID-19. Check [EPA’s list of disinfection products](#).
- See full CDC guidance: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

Document Updates:

| Date | Pg | Update |
|------------|----|---|
| 07/18/2022 | 1 | Added link to quarantine options document. |
| 07/18/2022 | 3 | Updated CDC quarantine guidance with “up-to-date” language. |