



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

May 11, 2021

Dear Wisconsin School Administrators,

Based on [current data](#), cases of COVID-19 remain high across Wisconsin. Now is the time we all must work together to protect our students and school staff from COVID-19 so we can look forward to a more normal school year in the fall.

COVID-19 Trends in Children and Youth

[Preliminary data](#) continue to show an increase in weekly case numbers in those under the age of 18. Compared to all other age groups, those under 18 are experiencing the greatest growth of COVID-19 cases. Preliminary data shows the [14-17 year old age group accounts for the most cases of COVID-19 among children younger than age 18](#), followed by the 9-13 year old age group.

At this time, only those 16 years and older are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. On May 10th, the FDA approved an amendment to Pfizer's Emergency Use Authorization to expand the age groups eligible for vaccine to include 12-15-year-olds, and the vaccine will be available to this group after the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice meets (scheduled for May 12) and issues clinical guidance. Because younger children are not yet able to get vaccinated, they are a population at risk of catching and spreading COVID-19. As of May 10, more than [28% of 16 and 17 year old Wisconsinites have gotten at least one dose](#) of the COVID-19 vaccine, with 16.5% having completed their vaccine series.

Isolation and Quarantine Strategies Remain Critical

School districts should encourage students, teachers, and staff to get tested and isolate at home when they are sick, or quarantine if they have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19. Although isolation and quarantine temporarily takes a child or teacher away from in-person instruction, it is necessary to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in school settings. When isolation and quarantine measures are not implemented, COVID-19 can spread throughout a school and cause illness that could lead to hospitalization or death.

A 14-day quarantine for close contacts remains the safest quarantine strategy for preventing transmission of COVID-19. However, a 10-day quarantine is also acceptable for unvaccinated people who remain symptom-free, provided that daily symptom monitoring continues for the full 14-day period. The duration of quarantine may be shortened further to seven days if the result of a diagnostic COVID-19 test collected on the sixth or seventh day of quarantine is negative and no symptoms were reported during daily symptom monitoring.

Shortened quarantine periods are not recommended for students and staff who are unable to safely and consistently wear masks or maintain physical distancing. These individuals should quarantine for a full 14 days. Individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 who were in close contact with someone with COVID-19 do not need to quarantine if they meet specific criteria. [Post-vaccination guidance for schools](#) is available.

Shortened quarantine options pose a higher level of risk compared to a 14-day quarantine. However, this risk is sometimes outweighed by the potential benefits of a quarantine requirement that places less burden on students and school staff. School and district administrators should work closely with their local health department, who have the statutory responsibility to require isolation and quarantine, to determine the safest course of action that is least disruptive to a child's learning experience.

Public Health Practices Prevent Disease Spread

Please encourage students and school staff to continue good pandemic behaviors in school settings. No single public health practice on its own will completely stop the spread of COVID-19. Schools should continue frequent cleaning and [disinfection](#) of highly touched surfaces. Encourage students, teachers, and staff to frequently wash their hands, specifically after blowing noses, sneezing, or coughing.

All students and staff who are able to properly and safely wear a mask should wear one. Studies show that a well-fitted, multi-layer face mask can [block the majority of respiratory droplets](#) from escaping into the air and also reduce the wearers' exposure to infectious droplets by effectively filtering them out of the air they breathe. However, masks are not a replacement for physical distancing and are most effective when combined with other preventive measures.

School Testing Support is Available

DHS has received federal funding to support school-based COVID-19 testing for teachers, staff, students, and their families for the 2021-2022 school year. Additional testing supplies may be available for Spring and Summer 2021. Schools that would like to initiate testing for students and staff to support a seven-day quarantine are encouraged to visit the [DHS COVID-19: Schools webpage](#) for more information or email dhsk12covidtesting@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

Everyone Can Help Stop the Spread of COVID-19

Implementation of multiple mitigation strategies will need to continue until disease transmission significantly decreases and there is greater COVID-19 vaccination coverage across the state. It is also important to note that vaccines are not yet approved for children under 12 years old. For these reasons, **even after teachers and staff are vaccinated, schools will need to continue to follow recommended mitigation strategies, such as isolation and quarantine, mask wearing, and physical distancing, for the foreseeable future.**

For the latest COVID-19 information and resources for schools, please visit [DHS' website](#). Thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to keeping Wisconsin students, teachers, and staff safe during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,



Julie Willems Van Dijk
Deputy Secretary & State Health Officer