

## COVID-19 Testing in Wisconsin Schools

School administrators, staff, students' families, and local health leaders are working together across Wisconsin to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. K-12 schools have implemented thoughtful, detailed protocols to prevent and respond to potential cases of the virus among their students and staff. As more tests are becoming available, school districts have questions about the use of COVID-19 testing as a mitigation strategy in education settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has now provided [guidance](#) to schools regarding testing as a COVID mitigation strategy. It is recommended districts work with their local health authority, insurance carrier, and legal counsel in determining to what degree your district may choose to implement this mitigation measure.

### Background on K-12 Covid-19 Testing

#### Types of Covid-19 Tests

There are two main types of viral tests that could be used to diagnose someone with COVID-19 (diagnostic tests):

- **Molecular/polymerase chain reaction (PCR)** tests detect the virus's genetic material. This test is the "gold standard" for detecting the virus that causes COVID-19 and typically requires a sample being sent to a laboratory. For this test, it is most common that samples are collected through a nasal or throat swab.
- **Rapid antigen** tests, which detect protein on the surface of the virus, are less sensitive and less specific than the PCR test. This means they miss some infections that would be detected by a PCR test, and they may be positive in someone who does not actually have the infection. In addition, more is known about their accuracy in people with symptoms than in people without symptoms. However, they can be performed without having to send the sample to a laboratory and results come back quickly (e.g., approximately 15 minutes). For this test, a sample may be collected through a nasal swab.

#### Testing Strategies

There are three different types of testing strategies that can be utilized among adults and children who work at or attend a K-12 school:

- Symptomatic: Testing individuals with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19
- Close Contacts of an Individual Diagnosed with COVID-19: Testing individuals with recent known close contact to a person with COVID-19. See [Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in Wisconsin](#) for definition of close contact.
- Broader Testing Strategies: Testing asymptomatic individuals without recent known exposure to a person with COVID-19.

"Pooled testing" refers to collecting samples from a group of individuals and testing all the samples together as a group or pool. If a positive result is obtained then every test sample is reanalyzed individually. This method of sample collection is used under a broader testing strategy. This approach increases the number of individuals that can be tested using the same amount of resources. However, because samples are diluted, which could result in less viral genetic material available to detect, there is a greater likelihood of false negative results, particularly if not properly validated. This method of pooling samples works well when there is a low prevalence of cases, meaning more negative results are expected than positive results.

The following are considerations related to these approaches to COVID-19 testing. For more information about these approaches, see the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) webpage at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-testing.html>

## Considerations for Testing Adults and Children Who Work at or Attend a K-12 School

### Symptomatic: Testing Individuals with Signs or Symptoms Consistent with COVID-19

- The Department of Health Services (DHS) currently [recommends](#) COVID-19 testing of symptomatic adults and children who work at or attend a K-12 school, with or without known contact with someone with COVID-19.
- The CDC [suggests](#) schools should offer referrals to diagnostic testing to any student, teacher, or staff member who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 at school.
- Symptomatic students or staff should not be sent to school in order to be tested.
- See [Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in Wisconsin](#) for information on how to respond to positive or negative test results.
- See CDC [COVID-19 Diagnosis flowchart](#).

### Close Contacts of an Individual Diagnosed with COVID-19: Testing individuals with recent known close contact with a person with COVID-19

- DHS [recommends](#) COVID-19 testing of adults and children who work at or attend a K – 12 school, whether they are symptomatic or asymptomatic, if they are a close contact of an individual who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- See CDC's [tiered approach of diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2](#).
- Symptomatic students or staff should not be sent to school in order to be tested.
- See [Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in Wisconsin](#) for information on how to respond to positive or negative test results.
- See CDC [COVID-19 Diagnosis flowchart](#).

### Broader Testing Strategies: Testing asymptomatic individuals without recent known exposure to a person with COVID-19.

Prior to implementing a broader testing strategy, a school district and local health departments (LHD) should consider the infrastructure and communication needed to support testing and follow up in the school setting, such as facilities for conducting testing (whether on-site at the school or in partnership with another testing location), trained staff to administer and interpret test results, school community (students, staff, families) buy-in to the broader testing approach, and access to a consistent supply of tests (whether antigen or PCR.)

The [CDC suggests](#) some schools may also elect to use screening testing as a strategy to identify cases and prevent secondary transmission. This includes, but is not limited to, screening testing of asymptomatic people without known exposure with the intent of making decisions based on the test results. Screening testing is intended to identify infected people without symptoms (or before development of symptoms) who may be contagious so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission. The intent is to use the screening testing results to determine who may return to in-person school or work and the protective measures that will be taken, and to identify and isolate positive persons to prevent spread.

### Logistical Considerations

School districts should collaborate as local education and health leaders, in conversation with legal counsel, as they weigh considerations regarding logistics in standing up a testing site at a school or serving adults or children who work in or attend a K-12 school. Logistical considerations are outlined below; this brief list is not exhaustive.

### **Testing Sites**

The location of where a COVID-19 test can be administered is an important consideration in order to make testing readily accessible. Point-of-care (POC) COVID-19 tests are intended to be quick with results made available with the person being tested on-site. They are typically done in a clinical setting (e.g. a doctor's office), so the test does not need to be sent off to another laboratory to determine the results. Antigen tests and some specific types of PCR tests are point-of-care.

The state of Wisconsin has now made at-home collection kits (molecular PCR) available as testing option for anyone with or without symptoms who lives in Wisconsin. More information on these test kits can be found on the DHS webpage: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/collection.htm>

### **CLIA Waiver**

If a LEA/school wants to administer COVID-19 testing on-site, federal rules require that testing in these settings be conducted in coordination with and under the authorization of a laboratory with a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act (CLIA) Certificate of Waiver or to maintain a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act (CLIA) Certificate of Waiver themselves. More information on

CLIA Certificates of Waiver information may be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/testing/nonclinical/clia.html> and at <https://www.cms.gov/regulations-and-guidance/legislation/clia/downloads/howobtaincertificateofwaiver.pdf>

## Reporting

All positive and negative test results must be reported as part of required reporting of COVID-19 diagnostic tests as mandated by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The most current reporting requirements and methods of reporting of COVID-19 diagnostic tests are described in the [COVID-19 Pandemic Response, Laboratory Data Reporting: CARES Act Section 18115](#) and [DHS reporting and surveillance guidance](#).

Providers and organizations using SARS-CoV-2 antigen tests should be aware of all reporting requirements for COVID-19. Information on reporting requirements are listed on the DHS webpage: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/providers.htm>

In addition, school administrators should notify staff, teachers, families and/or emergency contacts or legal guardians immediately of any case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with [HIPAA](#), [ADA](#), [FERPA](#), and other applicable laws and regulations. Notifications should be accessible for all students, faculty and staff, including those with disabilities or- limited English proficiency (e.g., through use of interpreters or translated materials).

## Parental Consent

Parental or guardian consent for (minor) student testing should be obtained.

## Challenges of school-based testing

School districts considering school-based testing are strongly encouraged to read the challenges and considerations sections of the CDC's [Interim Considerations for Testing for K-12 School Administrators and Public Health Officials](#) updated on December 4, 2020. Additional background information may be found in the National Association of School Nurses' [Interim Guidance: Role of the School Nurse In COVID-19 Testing in Schools](#).

## References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operationstrategy.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschools-childcare%2Fk-12-testing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operationstrategy.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschools-childcare%2Fk-12-testing.html)

Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC) Interim Considerations for Testing for K-12 School Administrators and Public Health Officials: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-testing.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC) Interim Guidance for Antigen Testing for SARS-CoV-2: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antigen-tests-guidelines.html>

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. *Considerations For COVID-19 Testing of Adults and Children Who Work at or Attend a K-12 School.*

<https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/education/K-12-COVID-19-Testing-Considerations.pdf>

Wisconsin Department of Health Services HAN #17: [Important Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Antigen Tests](#)

Wisconsin Department of Health Services: [Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in Wisconsin.](#)

Resources:

[Interim Considerations for Testing for K-12 School Administrators and Public Health Officials Self-assessment Checklist for Good Testing Practices.](#)

National Association of School Nurses: [Interim Guidance: Role of the School Nurse In COVID-19 Testing in Schools.](#)