

Recommendations/FAQs on Testing for Schools

Revised 08/2020

Should all staff and students be tested before the start of the school year?

It is not the DHS current recommendation to test every student or staff member prior to the start of school.

Testing can only provide information on whether a person is currently infected at the point in time that they are tested; testing negative for COVID-19 at the start of the semester does not mean the students and staff will not become infected soon after receiving their results. Asymptomatic students and staff would need to be tested regularly to determine their current infection status. At this time, widespread testing of asymptomatic individuals, outside of an outbreak setting or a high-risk congregate living setting, is not recommended due to limited testing supplies and capacity.

Students and staff should be tested when they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Local and tribal health departments will work together with school administrators on contact tracing efforts to notify staff and students who need to quarantine and seek out testing as a result of exposure.



Should all staff and students be tested for antibodies before the start of the school year?

No. Antibody testing should not be used to inform decisions about returning to work or school, as we do not yet know whether having antibodies means that a person is immune to or protected from future COVID-19 infection. Further, the reliability and precision of current antibody testing remains unclear.

If I know I have been exposed to a confirmed case via contact tracing, will I be required to take a test before being allowed at the school?

No. Students and staff who have been exposed to a confirmed case will not be required to be tested for COVID-19 before returning to school. However, they should get tested, stay home until 14 days after their last exposure and monitor for symptoms. If they develop symptoms, they should stay home until 24 hours have passed without a fever and without the use of fever-reducing medications, improvement in any COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), and at least 10 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared.

Will my exposure status be reported to school administrators?

If a student or staff member needs to be absent from school because they are being quarantined, you may be asked to report the reason for your absence to the school to assist in their monitoring efforts. Local public health departments may also contact schools to inform them of cases.

Can schools inform other students, parents, or staff if an individual who was in school tests positive for COVID-19?

School districts have the right to inform other students, their parents, and staff if an individual who was in school tests positive for COVID-19 so long as no personally identifiable information will be shared, including the individual's name, grade, or if they were a student or staff member. Additionally, other individuals must be absent for other reasons to ensure that a reasonable member of the school community could not easily identify those who may be absent due to COVID-19. For more information, reference this [FAQ](#) document from the Department of Education Student Privacy Policy Office.

Should schools contact local and tribal health departments if they send a student or staff member home with COVID-19-like symptoms? Is it legal for schools to disclose this information to health departments?

School administrators are encouraged to work with their local and tribal health departments to establish a process for notifying the health department about suspected or confirmed cases, as notification preferences may vary between health departments. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) health or safety emergency exception permits schools to disclose PII from student education records to appropriate officials at a public health department without prior written consent. For more information, reference this [FAQ](#) document from the Department of Education Student Privacy Policy Office. [Wis. Stat. 252.05\(3\)](#) authorizes schools to disclose staff who are sent home with symptoms to the local health department.

Should schools test symptomatic students and staff onsite?

DHS recommends that schools work with local partners to develop a plan to assist students and staff to get access to testing. Testing students and staff in schools would require adding staff capacity, assuring

availability of PPE, developing a relationship with a courier and a lab, as well as a process for notifying results. Any symptomatic students and staff should be isolated immediately, sent home as soon as possible, and directed to seek out testing from their regular health care provider. Schools may also consider contracting with a local clinic or pharmacy to administer tests to students and staff who may not have access to testing through their regular health care provider or at a community-based testing site.

What should I do if I have been asked to get a test?

Call your primary care provider or [visit the DHS website](#) to see if there is a community testing site near you. After being tested, you can expect

to receive your result in 1-7 days. If you are sick, limit your contact with others outside of your household during this time by staying home as much as possible. For more information on best practices to protect yourself and others, refer to the [DHS COVID-19 Testing: Next Steps and Results](#) guide.



What if my test result was negative but I am still displaying symptoms?

It would be recommended to not come to school and stay home as you may have a different respiratory virus or may have developed COVID-19 since your test. Students and staff could return to school after 24 hours have passed without a fever and without the use of fever-reducing medications, there has been improvement in symptoms (e.g, cough, shortness of breath), and 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared. If a student or staff member tests negative but an alternative diagnosis is identified (e.g., influenza; hand, foot and mouth disease; norovirus, etc.), they must follow the criteria for exclusion from school for the diagnosed disease.

What if my test result was positive but I am asymptomatic?

Students and staff who test positive without experiencing any symptoms should stay home until 10 days have passed since the date their tested specimen was collected.

Should schools require a negative test result for student or staff before returning to school after they have been sick?

No. It is not recommended to require a negative test before returning to school or work, as testing supplies and laboratory capacity are limited and there have been reports that an individual can continue to test positive long after they are considered to be contagious. Students and staff can return to school after 24 hours have passed without a fever and without the use of fever-reducing medications, improvement in any COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), and at least 10 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared. Students and staff who did not experience symptoms but tested positive can return to school after at least 10 days have passed since the date of their diagnostic test.



Is there a “trigger point” at which a certain number of infections would require or suggest the implementation of school-wide testing?

No. These decisions depend on many factors and should be made in consultation with your state and/or local health department and other relevant local officials.

Is there a “trigger point” for a certain level of community spread that would require or suggest the implementation of school-wide testing or a testing schedule (e.g., school-wide testing every 3 weeks)?

No. These decisions depend on many factors and should be made in consultation with your state and/or local health department and other relevant local officials.

Additional resources

CDC: COVID-19 Testing: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/index.html
CDC: FAQs for K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools-faq.html
CDC: Testing in K-12 Schools: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-testing.html>