



Interim COVID-19 guidance for schools: Management of suspect and confirmed COVID-19 cases

This guidance is intended for schools to plan their response to known or possible cases of COVID-19 as well as known contacts. This is based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and will be updated as more information and guidance becomes available. (Information updated since last guidance provided in *italics*).

Students or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 (*but no known exposures to someone contagious with COVID-19*)

Students and staff should be excluded from school if they have:

- *Any of the following with or without fever:*
 - *Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing -or -*
 - *Loss of taste or smell -or –*
 - *New or worsening cough*

If these symptoms are explainable by an underlying condition (such as shortness of breath for an individual with asthma) exclusion may not be necessary.

This is not a complete list of all symptoms of COVID-19, but only those that should trigger an automatic exclusion and evaluation for COVID-19. Other symptoms may include: fever, chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea/vomiting, or diarrhea. Many COVID-19 cases show no symptoms at all, and a person is able to spread the virus up to two (2) days before they have any symptoms. Given the overlap of these symptoms with other more common illnesses and the lack of symptoms in many cases, it is not possible to identify and exclude all cases of COVID-19 through [screening of symptoms](#). Careful [preventive actions](#) within the school are needed to reduce the chances of spread.

Schools should plan to have a room identified to isolate students or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 identified during the school day.

- Students and staff should be moved safely, respectfully, as well as in accordance with any applicable privacy laws or regulations, to the isolation room for evaluation. The individual should be provided a mask if they are able to use one, and students should be supervised by a staff member who maintains at least six feet of distance and uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) if available.
- School nurses and other healthcare providers should use [Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions](#) when caring for sick people. See: What Healthcare

Personnel Should Know About [Caring for Patients with Confirmed or Possible COVID19 Infection](#).

Return to school

- Advise sick staff members and children not to return until they have met criteria for return.
- Students or staff excluded for these symptoms should not return until they have either tested negative for COVID-19 or a medical evaluation determines that their symptoms were more likely due to another cause (e.g. sore throat due to strep throat). In this later case, the individual can return when they meet criteria for that condition.
- Students or staff that require testing for COVID-19 will require a negative PCR test (mouth or nose swab) or similar test that directly detects the virus or must complete the current isolation criteria for COVID-19 to return to school.
- Current **isolation criteria** for COVID-19:
 - *Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 and persons with symptoms of COVID-19 (see list above) who do not get tested, should isolate until:*
 - *Ten (10) days* have passed since symptoms started - and –*
 - *Twenty-four (24) hours have passed since last fever without taking medicine to reduce fever - and -*
 - *Overall improvement in symptoms.*
 - *Those who test positive by a PCR (mouth or throat swab) test or similar viral test but do not have symptoms will be required to stay out of school until ten (10) days* after the specimen was collected.*
 - **Note: some people may be required to extend the isolation period to twenty (20) days. Their doctor will need to determine if this is necessary.*
 - *The criteria above should be used to determine eligibility to return to school. Negative PCR test results are not required nor recommended after meeting these criteria.*

Testing

A student or staff member who develops symptoms of COVID-19 but does not get tested could limit DHEC's ability to appropriately respond to new cases and ensure the health and safety of other students and staff. PCR testing (nose or throat swab) or similar test that directly detects the virus is required as there is delay in developing detectable antibodies. A negative antibody test is insufficient to rule out a new infection.

- Location of testing sites is available on the DHEC website: <https://scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-screening-testing-sites>
- Location of DHEC mobile and pop-up testing sites: <https://www.scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-mobile-pop-clinics>

It is recommended that close contacts of cases who have no symptoms be tested but no sooner than seven (7) days after first contact with the individual with COVID-19 while they were contagious. This testing is not a requirement for return but should be encouraged. Those who

develop symptoms should be tested as soon as possible and must follow the guidance above to return to school.

Cases in classroom

If a student or staff member tests positive, they could have been contagious with the virus up to 48 hours before their symptoms began or before their test specimen was collected (for those with no symptoms).

- [Prevention](#) - Routinely using these precautions will help avoid the need to quarantine all classroom contacts of persons with COVID-19:
 - It is essential that staff ensure maximum distancing between students and other staff while in the classroom and throughout the day to limit the possibility of transmission.
 - *Masks should be used as directed among students and staff.*
 - *CDC provides [toolkits for K-12 schools](#) for prevention planning.*
- Anyone known to be a **close contact** (defined as being within six (6) feet for fifteen (15) minutes or more) to a COVID-19 case while contagious must be excluded from school for fourteen (14) days after last contact with the person with COVID-19.
 - People who have recovered from a confirmed illness (PCR test, nose or throat swab test) in the past three (3) months will not need to quarantine after a close contact with someone with COVID-19. See "Quarantine" below.
- For any classrooms where social distancing could not be maintained (classes with young children who do not have assigned seating throughout the day), all children and staff must be considered close contacts and must complete a fourteen (14) day quarantine period.
- Students and teachers in a classroom with a known COVID-19 case in which social distancing was reliably maintained should remain together in the same cohort to the extent that is possible. They should receive screening for fever and symptoms (see above) each morning until 14 days after last contact with the case. Note: anyone determined to be a "close contact" must be excluded.
 - Any of these students or teachers who are monitored and found to have symptoms of COVID-19 should be sent home and excluded and will be required to get tested or complete the required isolation period to return to school.
- The classroom will need to be closed for [cleaning and disinfection](#) before use again.

Quarantine

Some students or staff may have been told they were a close contact to a case of COVID-19 and have to complete a quarantine period. This means they will be required to stay home so they do not risk exposing others to COVID-19 if they become sick. For students, a parents' note that they have been cleared from quarantine may be used to allow return to school. [CDC provides guidance on appropriately counting the quarantine period for different scenarios.](#)

- **Household contact:** If the child or staff member lives in the same household as the case, they will have to quarantine an additional fourteen (14) days after the date their household member has been cleared from their isolation period ([Scenario 4](#)).
- **Other close contact:** If a child or staff member has been told they are a close contact to a case of COVID-19, they will need to quarantine until 14 days after the last contact with the case ([Scenario 1](#)).

- Other household member in quarantine: If the child or staff member lives in the same household as someone in quarantine, they will not necessarily need to quarantine themselves unless the household member in quarantine is determined to be a COVID-19 case. DHEC will notify those who are required to complete quarantine.
- Those with COVID-19 who recovered: *If a student or staff member is a lab confirmed case of COVID-19 by PCR (nose or throat swab), they do not need to quarantine again after close contact to someone with COVID-19 in the first three (3) months after recovering but will for any close contact that happens after that three (3) month period.*
 - *The person must provide either a note from a healthcare provider that they had the positive lab result in the past three (3) months or provide a paper or electronic copy of the results (SARS-CoV-2 RNA – Detected or Positive)*
 - *A positive antibody results (SARS-CoV-2 IgG or IgM) or any other lab test is not sufficient to meet these criteria to defer quarantine. They must quarantine according to the current guidelines.*
- Staff working while in quarantine: *To limit the chances of COVID-19 spread in the facility, staff should plan to quarantine at home and not return to work after close contact to someone contagious with COVID-19. However, school staff could be considered critical infrastructure workers and thus may be permitted to work if they follow the precautions outlined in the links below. It is recommended that schools notify parents and guardians that this approach is being used to allow staff to return to work.*
 - *These employees must wear a mask at all times while in the school, monitor for symptoms daily and throughout the day, practice social distancing to the extent possible, practice good hand hygiene, and clean frequently touched surfaces often. Review links below for specific guidelines. These employees should avoid working with children and staff with medical conditions that may put them at risk for severe illness. Those unable to follow the outlined precautions should not plan to return to work until completing their quarantine period.*
 - *These employees should continue to quarantine at home when they are not at work and avoid public settings.*
 - *If these employees have any of the symptoms listed above, they must not go to work or must separate themselves from others and leave immediately. They should not plan to return until they meet "Return to School" criteria above.*
 - *Links to guidance for critical infrastructure workers:*
 - https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHS/2020/04/09/file_attachments/1423331/DC_CISA_Interim_Guidance_Critical_Workers_Safety_Practices_COVID19.pdf
 - https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHS/2020/04/09/file_attachments/1423330/DC_CISA_Flyer_Essential_Critical_Workers_Dos_and_Donts_COVID19.pdf