

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 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.

This document outlines the actions that should be taken when a person with COVID-19 is identified in a school: 1. Steps to identify COVID-19 infections and report to LDH; 2. Steps to identify and notify close contacts; and 3. Steps to conduct cleaning and disinfection.

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 molecular/PCR or antigen tests, whether rapid or send-out. Antibody tests indicate past exposure and *should not* be used to diagnose current infection or to initiate contact tracing.
 - OR**
 - Suspect Case: someone who is clinically diagnosed with COVID-19 or meets the following clinical criteria:
 - At least one of the following major COVID-19 symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or new changes in sense of smell or taste
 - OR**
 - At least two of the following minor COVID-19 symptoms: fever (measured or subjective), chills, rigors, muscle ache/myalgia, headache, sore throat, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, congestion/runny nose or fatigue
 - AND**
 - No alternative more likely diagnosis
 - If a suspect case subsequently tests negative by molecular/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. If a suspect case tests negative by antigen test, they should continue to follow recommendations for suspect cases as antigen tests are not as sensitive as molecular/PCR tests and may result in a false negative.
- If a person has symptoms but does not meet the symptom criteria for suspect cases above, they should be sent home and not return to school until they are symptom-free for 24 hours. Contact tracing does not need to be done for these individuals.

- Isolate and send the person home immediately.** They should not return to school until the following “end of self-isolation criteria” are met:
 - For a person with ANY symptom(s):
 - At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared **AND**
 - At least 24 hours have passed since the resolution of fever without the use of fever reducing medications **AND**
 - Other symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved.
 - For a person who remained asymptomatic (i.e., never had any symptoms):
 - At least 10 days have passed since positive test collection date.
- Report all confirmed and suspect cases to 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 molecular/PCR test result or alternative more likely diagnosis is not available within 48 hours of meeting clinical criteria, close contacts should be quarantined as described below.
 - If a molecular/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
 - 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 coverings and plastic dividers are not considered in determining close contacts, though they do reduce the risk of transmission.
 - 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.
 - Quarantine for close contacts previously diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 90 days:**
 - If they were previously symptomatic within the last 90 days AND they tested positive for COVID-19 by PCR or antigen test, they do not need to quarantine unless symptoms develop.**

- If they tested positive for COVID-19 by PCR or antigen test within 14 days of being identified as a close contact of another COVID-19 case within the last 90 days, they do not need to quarantine unless symptoms develop.
- If they were asymptomatic with no known close contact with a COVID-19 case **AND** tested positive for COVID-19 by PCR (not antigen test) within the last 90 days, they do not need to quarantine unless symptoms develop.
 - Asymptomatic individuals with no known close contact with a COVID-19 case and only a positive antigen test within the last 90 days, should self-quarantine.
- If they do have symptoms, they should self-quarantine immediately and consult with a medical provider to determine if they may have been re-infected with COVID-19 or if symptoms are caused by something else.
- **Quarantine for fully vaccinated close contacts:**
 - Close contacts who meet all of the following criteria do not need to quarantine but should still watch for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure and follow all prevention guidance.
 - Are fully vaccinated (i.e., ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine) at the time of exposure, **AND**
 - Have remained asymptomatic since the current COVID-19 exposure
 - If fully vaccinated close contacts have symptoms, they should self-quarantine immediately for 10 days after symptom onset and get tested.
- **Notify close contacts of the need to quarantine.**
 - Notify all close contacts of suspect and confirmed cases that they have been identified as having been 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:** Close contacts should quarantine for 14 days from the last day they were exposed to a suspect or confirmed case. Options to shorten the duration of quarantine if contacts remain asymptomatic include:
 - If no symptoms develop during quarantine **AND** they have a negative antigen or PCR/molecular test collected no earlier than day 5 after their last exposure: they may quarantine for 7 days from last contact with a COVID-19 case **OR**
 - If no symptoms develop during quarantine and no testing is done: they may quarantine for 10 days from last contact with a COVID-19 case.
 - If quarantine is shortened, daily symptom monitoring and strict adherence to prevention measures including social distancing, hand washing, and especially wearing masks/face coverings, should continue until the full 14 days from last contact with a COVID-19 case.
 - Because there is an increased risk of post-quarantine transmission associated with options to shorten quarantine, **OPH recommends use of the 14-day quarantine period in daycare and other school settings where masking among children is not maintained.** In addition, due to the high rates of transmission that have been observed among K-12 sports teams, **exposed individuals should not participate in athletic events where distancing and/or masking is not maintained until the full 14-day quarantine has been completed.**

- Close contacts who develop symptoms on or before day 14 after their last exposure are considered suspect cases regardless of meeting criteria for a shortened quarantine and should self-isolate immediately and seek testing.
- Encourage the close contacts to call the Louisiana Department of Public Health Contact Tracers at 1-877-766-2130.
- Ensure close contacts remain out of school until the end of their quarantine period.**
 - Close contacts should not return to school until they have met end of quarantine criteria.
 - If a close contact in quarantine 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” above to return to school.
 - If a close contact in quarantine 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” above to return to school or 14-day quarantine, whichever is longer.
 - If a close contact in quarantine 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 above to return to school.
 - If a close contact has a viral test collected earlier than day 5 of quarantine and the result is negative:
 - they should remain in quarantine for the duration of the 10-day quarantine as long as they remain asymptomatic **OR**
 - receive an additional test collected on or after day 5 of quarantine. If the repeat test is negative and they remain asymptomatic, then they may end quarantine after day 7.
 - If a suspect case tests negative by molecular/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.
 - If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
- 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 Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene in Schools Guidance](#).

Document Updates:

Date	Update
9/24/2020	Added clarifications that close contacts of both confirmed and suspected cases should be quarantined

9/24/2020	Added clarifications that suspect cases who test negative by antigen test would still be considered suspect cases. Only PCR negative tests rule out suspect COVID-19.
10/20/2020	Close contacts of suspect cases do not need to be quarantined until 2 days after the suspect case meets clinical criteria to allow for test results to return.
10/22/2020	The definition of close contact clarified to be within 6 ft of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hr period.
10/26/2020	Clarified quarantine for close contacts of suspect cases may be delayed 48 hours after the suspect case meets clinical criteria to allow for molecular/PCR test results or an alternative more likely diagnosis to be made by a physician.
12/23/2020	Added alternative quarantine duration recommendations.
02/19/2021	Added quarantine guidance for fully vaccinated close contacts.
4/1/2021	Removed 3 months from timeframe of exemption from quarantine for fully-vaccinated close contacts