

CUYAHOGA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

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Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH) COVID-19 Guidance for K-12 Schools 2023-2024 School Year¹

Introduction

Schools are an important part of the infrastructure of communities as they provide safe, supportive learning environments for students. This guidance can help K-12 schools remain open and help their administrators support safe, in-person learning while reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Knowing the COVID levels in the county can help schools make more informed decisions around infection control practices and procedures. This information can be found on the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH) [COVID-19 dashboard](#) and the CDC [COVID-19 County Check](#). Some of the guidance in this document refers to the hospital admission levels, which can be found using the CDC [link](#).

Though this guidance is written for COVID-19 prevention, many of the layered prevention strategies described in this guidance can help prevent the spread of other infectious diseases, such as influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and norovirus, and support healthy learning environments for all.

Staying Home When Sick

People who have symptoms of respiratory or gastrointestinal infections, such as cough, fever, sore throat, vomiting, or diarrhea, should stay home. Testing is recommended for people with symptoms of COVID-19 as soon as possible after symptoms begin. If a person with COVID-19 symptoms tests negative for COVID-19, they should consider getting tested for other respiratory illnesses that could be spread to others, such as flu. If tested using an antigen test, negative tests should be repeated following FDA recommendations.

In accordance with applicable laws and regulations, schools should allow flexible, non-punitive, and supportive paid sick leave policies and practices. These policies should support workers caring for a sick family member and encourage sick workers to stay home without fear of retaliation, loss of pay, loss of employment, or other negative impacts. Schools should also provide excused absences for students who are sick, avoid policies that incentivize coming to school while sick, and support children who are learning at home if they are sick. Schools should ensure that employees and families are aware of and understand these policies and avoid language that penalizes or stigmatizes staying home when sick.

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Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

Washing hands can prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Schools should teach and reinforce proper handwashing to lower the risk of spreading viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19. Schools should monitor and reinforce these behaviors, especially during key times in the day (for example, before and after eating, after using the restroom, and after recess) and should also provide adequate handwashing supplies, including soap and water. If washing hands is not possible, schools should provide hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Hand sanitizers should be stored up, away, and out of sight of younger children and should be used only with adult supervision for children ages 5 years and younger.

Schools should teach and reinforce covering coughs and sneezes to help keep individuals from getting and spreading infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

Cleaning

Schools should clean surfaces at least once a day to reduce the spread of germs. Also, if a person with COVID-19 has been inside a school within the last 24 hours, the space should be cleaned and disinfected. For more information, see [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

Screening Testing

Screening testing identifies people with COVID-19 who do not have symptoms or known or suspected exposures, so that steps can be taken to prevent further spread of COVID-19. CDC and CCBH no longer recommend routine screening testing in K-12 schools. However, at a high COVID-19 hospital admission level, K-12 schools can consider implementing screening testing for students and staff for high-risk activities (for example, close contact sports, band, choir, theater); at key times in the year, for example before/after large events and when returning from breaks.

Schools can request COVID-19 tests at testingrequests@odh.ohio.gov.

Management of Cases and Exposures

Students or staff who come to school with symptoms or develop symptoms while at school should be asked to wear a well-fitting mask or respirator while in the building and be sent home

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and encouraged to get tested. Symptomatic people who cannot wear a mask should be separated from others as much as possible; children should be supervised by a designated caregiver who is wearing a well-fitting mask or respirator until they leave school grounds.

Schools should develop mechanisms to ensure that people with COVID-19 isolate away from others and do not attend school until they have completed isolation. All individuals who test positive for COVID-19, or who are sick and do not yet have test results, should isolate for at least 5 days.

- **Those with no symptoms** may end isolation after day 5. Day 0 is the day that they were tested (not the day they receive the positive result). Day 1 is the first full day after the day that they were tested. If the person then develops symptoms within 10 days of being tested, the clock starts again and the day they first experience symptoms becomes day 0.
- **Those with mild symptoms** may end isolation after day 5 if they have been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and their symptoms are improving. If they continue to have a fever and/or their symptoms are not improving, they should continue to isolate. Day 0 of isolation is the day that the symptoms start no matter when they test positive. Day 1 is the first full day after the day that they started to experience symptoms.
- **Those who had moderate illness (experienced shortness of breath or had difficulty breathing)** should isolate through day 10. Day 0 of isolation is the day that the symptoms start no matter when they test positive. Day 1 is the first full day after the day that they started to experience symptoms.
- **Those who had severe illness (were hospitalized) or have a weakened immune system** should isolate at least through day 10 and should consult a doctor before ending isolation. Day 0 of isolation is the day that the symptoms start no matter when they test positive. Day 1 is the first full day after the day that they started to experience symptoms.

Once isolation has ended, people should wear a well-fitting mask or respirator around others through day 10. Testing is not required to determine the end of isolation or mask use after having COVID-19; People who are not able to wear a well-fitting mask or respirator should either isolate for 10 full days

If a person with COVID-19 has been inside a school within the last 24 hours, the space should be cleaned and disinfected.

Quarantine is no longer recommended for people who are exposed to COVID-19 in most community settings, including schools.

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Responding to Outbreaks

A COVID-19 outbreak at a school is defined as 3 or more cases (or more than 10%) within a 14 day period within a specific school setting (a classroom, a sports team, a lunchroom, or a school event for example). If a school is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak they should consider adding prevention strategies. Strategies that can help reduce transmission during an outbreak include wearing well-fitting masks or respirators, improving ventilation (for example moving school activities outdoors, opening windows and doors, using air filters), screening testing, and case investigation and contact tracing. Early identification of cases to ensure that they stay home and isolate is a critical component of outbreak response. Schools may also consider suspending high-risk activities to control a school- or program-associated outbreak. Schools that are experiencing outbreaks should work with their local health department.

Considerations for High-Risk Activities

Due to increased and forceful exhalation that occurs during physical activity, some sports can put players, coaches, trainers, and others at increased risk for getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Close contact sports and indoor sports are particularly risky for participants and spectators, especially in crowded, indoor venues. Similar risks may exist for other extracurricular activities, such as band, choir, theater, and other school clubs that meet indoors and entail increased exhalation. At a high COVID-19 hospital admission level, schools can consider implementing screening testing for high-risk activities such as indoor sports and extracurricular activities. Schools may consider temporarily stopping these activities to control a school-associated outbreak, or during periods of high COVID-19 hospital admission levels.

Additional Resources

- For further information contact CCBH at schools@ccbh.net
- Guidance on Isolation for COVID-19 Cases: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html>
- Guidance for K-12 Schools: [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning | CDC](#)
- Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility: [When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility | Water, Sanitation, and Environmentally Related Hygiene | CDC](#)
- Schools can request COVID-19 tests at testingrequests@odh.ohio.gov