School COVID-19 Testing Initiatives:

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should students or staff be tested for COVID-19?

COVID-19 testing is a critical part of breaking the cycle of spreading the virus, so that contact tracers can find COVID-19 and contain it before it spreads to anyone else. The goal of regular COVID-19 testing in schools is to quickly find individual cases before they become outbreaks. When used alongside other prevention strategies, like distancing and face masks, COVID-19 testing creates an additional level of reassurance that it is safe to keep schools open with students and educators in the classroom.

Many students and some staff remain unvaccinated, and children below 12 are not yet eligible for vaccines. School COVID-19 testing is one more layer of protection that helps Marylanders know that in-person learning is safe.

How does the testing program work? What's involved?

Your child's school/school system may choose to participate in the **COVID Diagnostic Testing Program** and/or the **Screening Testing Program.**

In the **Diagnostic Testing Program**, students and staff will be tested if they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or if they are identified as a close contact. The program is designed to provide free and easy COVID-19 testing as well as coordinated response if any positive case is found.

The goal of the **Screening Testing Program** is to catch any asymptomatic or presymptomatic COVID-19 cases as early as possible. In the Screening Testing Program, your child's school/school system will work with a State-contracted COVID-19 testing vendor to implement the testing program in your child's school. Testing frequency and process for testing will be determined by your child's school/school system in consultation with the testing vendor, your Local Health Department, and the Maryland Department of Health.

Please consult your child's school for more information.

Why is screening for COVID-19 so important?

Screening is the only way we can find and isolate people who have COVID-19 without symptoms before they spread the virus to others. Individuals with COVID-19 can be infectious for 2- 3 days before they show symptoms. In addition, up to 50% of children and 20% of adults infected with COVID-19 never show any symptoms at all – they are asymptomatic.

Screening in the schools is a way to prevent disease spread in the community. Any COVID-19 cases we are able to find and isolate are cases that will not be able to spread further in the community. Regular COVID-19 testing can quickly detect, trace, and isolate COVID-19 positive individuals. This will help lower the risk of transmission and allow us to have more consistent in-person instruction. With continued testing, our teachers and students will have the opportunity to do what they do best - teaching and learning.

How often will testing occur?

Testing frequency will be determined by your child's school system, in consultation with the Local Health Department, Maryland Department of Health, and CDC guidance. Testing may take place as students or staff experience symptoms, through the diagnostic testing program, or on a routine (ex. weekly, bi-monthly) basis, through the screening testing program.

What kind of test will you use?

This will depend on your child's school; however, the COVID-19 tests typically conducted include the use of painless oral or nasal swabs to collect a sample in seconds. Depending upon the type of test, results may be returned in 15 minutes with other results taking about 24-48 hours. MDH is currently partnering with several testing vendors that are experienced in COVID-19 testing, especially in school settings. These testing vendors use a variety of oral or lower nasal swab test kits that are easy to administer and don't hurt. These are NOT the deep nasal or "brain tickler" swabs.

If your child's school participates in the screening testing program, onsite staff will be available to assist in the administration of the test. Alternatively, children as young as 5 are able to administer their own test under the observation of a trained test administrator. You can view this video **here** of a young child self-administering a COVID-19 test. Samples will be sent to the contracted lab, which will provide results directly to parents within 48 hours from when the test was taken.

How will I get my child's test results?

Depending on the testing vendor your child's school selects, an online account will be created where you can log in and check results. Additional processes for notifying parents of a positive test result will be communicated by your child's school and/or school system.

Where and when will the testing take place? Will testing cause disruption to learning or schedules?

COVID-19 testing times and frequency will likely vary by location, as each school or local school system designs a testing program which works for them. However, every effort will be made to schedule testing during non-academic times of the day, such as lunch, to avoid disruption of learning.

What happens when a member of the school community tests positive?

If a person tests positive for COVID-19, they should follow the guidance of their health care provider, and follow MDH and CDC guidelines for **Isolation and Quarantine**. Depending on whether the person

who tests positive for COVID-19 is fully vaccinated, or develops symptoms, different guidelines may be advised. Also, please answer the call or text from MD COVID or (240) 466-4488 to help Maryland contact tracers slow the spread of COVID-19.

Do I have to pay for the test? Do I need to have insurance?

Testing is free to you, there is no out-of-pocket cost or co-pay. You may be asked to provide insurance information if you have it, and they will bill your insurance directly. You will not receive a bill for your test.

How will schools and MDH protect my privacy?

Trusted school health staff and administrators at your school or local school system will be alerted if there is a positive test result. Specifically designated staff members will then review individual test results and initiate outbreak mitigation. They will help with contract tracing to prevent further transmission and protect the other teachers, staff, students, and families within the school community. All health information is kept private and is protected by federal privacy rules.

When a positive case is identified through an individual diagnostic test, that student or staff member should be immediately isolated. Doing so in a way that protects their privacy is important. Remember that there are many reasons an individual might have to stay home from school.

I don't want my child tested. Can I opt out?

Yes! Only students who have completed a consent form will be included in the testing. However, the more students who are tested, the more likely we are to find any positive cases, even in those students who may be asymptomatic.

My child is vaccinated. Do they need to participate in testing?

No, based on CDC and MDH guidance, fully vaccinated students and staff do not need to participate in screening testing. Diagnostic testing if they have COVID-19 symptoms may still be appropriate, however.