

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Updated Considerations for Quarantine, Isolation, Testing, and Contact Tracing Policies and Procedures in PreK-12 Schools

This update outlines a set of optional policy and procedural changes related to quarantine/isolation, testing, contact tracing, and return to school activities that school districts may choose to implement at this time. These options are being offered to Connecticut school districts to refocus the resources currently available to PreK-12 schools for COVID-19 prevention toward those activities most likely to reduce the risk of transmission and in consideration of recent changes in CDC guidance for quarantine and isolation for individuals testing positive for, or exposed to someone with, COVID-19.

Quarantine, Isolation, Testing, and Return to Activities

On December 27, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released [updated guidance](#) regarding the appropriate duration of quarantine and isolation for COVID-19. Based on this updated guidance and the science supporting it, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) advises at this time that it is appropriate to allow school districts the choice to make changes in their operating rules regarding quarantine, isolation, testing, and return to in-school activities. These suggested changes are designed to focus on the increased risk from individuals reporting for school-related activities with active symptoms of illness and the decreased risk for and from individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. In brief:

- Individuals who are even mildly symptomatic with any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19 should immediately isolate at home, test for the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) with a PCR, antigen, or self-test, and remain away from activities outside of the home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours and other symptoms are significantly improved.
- Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should isolate at home for at least 5 days, or longer if symptoms develop and persist. A mask should continue to be worn for an additional 5 days at all times when around others.
- Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals who are notified that they have had a close contact with an individual who has confirmed or suspected COVID-19 should immediately quarantine at home and test for the virus 5 days after their last exposure to the COVID-19 case. This is especially important in situations where extended high-intensity exposure may have occurred, such as with household contacts, in unmasked social settings (e.g., sleepovers, parties), and/or during athletic activities.

The table below outlines different scenarios that may occur in school settings, considerations for each individual situation, and appropriate actions for individuals and schools to take in response.

	Student/Staff with any COVID-19 symptoms	Student/Staff with no COVID-19 symptoms
<p>If fully vaccinated against COVID-19 <i>(defined as two weeks after second dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or first dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine)</i></p>	<p>Isolate at home.</p> <p>Test for COVID-19 (either self-test or at a testing site).</p> <p>If test result is negative, return to activities when fever-free for at least 24 hrs. and other symptoms are significantly improved.</p> <p>If test result is positive, isolate for at least 5 days, return to activities on day 6 or later when fever-free for at least 24 hrs. and other symptoms are significantly improved.</p> <p>Wear a mask at all times when around others for an additional 5 days (i.e., through day 10).</p>	<p><i>If notified of a close contact with a COVID-19 case outside of the school day:</i></p> <p>Continue with in-person learning.</p> <p>Test for COVID-19 (either self-test or at a testing site) 5 days after the exposure.</p> <p>Consider quarantining for 5-days from other activities outside of school, especially if notified of an extended high-intensity exposure (e.g., household contact, unmasked social contact, contact during athletic activities).</p> <p>Wear a mask at all times during any activities when around others for 10 days.</p>
<p>If only partially vaccinated <i>(one dose of a two dose COVID-19 vaccine or within two weeks of final dose)</i></p> <p>or</p> <p>Unvaccinated</p> <p>or</p> <p>Vaccination status is unknown</p>	<p><i>If notified of a close contact with a COVID-19 case outside of the school day:</i></p> <p>Isolate at home for a minimum of 5 days since last exposure to the COVID-19 case.</p> <p>Test for COVID-19 (either self-test or at a testing site).</p> <p>Return to activities on day 6 or later when fever-free for at least 24 hrs. and other symptoms are significantly improved.</p> <p>Wear a mask at all times during any activities when around others for an additional 5 days (i.e., through day 10).</p>	<p><i>If no known close contact with a COVID-19 case outside of the school day:</i></p> <p>Isolate at home.</p> <p>Test for COVID-19 (either self-test or at a testing site).</p> <p>If test result is negative, return to activities when fever-free for at least 24 hrs. and other symptoms are significantly improved.</p> <p>If test result is positive, isolate for at least 5 days after symptoms began, return to activities on day 6 or later when fever-free for at least 24 hrs. and other symptoms are significantly improved, and wear a mask at all times during any activities when around others for an additional 5 days (i.e., through day 10).</p>
		<p><i>If notified of a close contact with a COVID-19 case outside of the school day:</i></p> <p>Quarantine at home from school, extracurricular activities, and other activities for 5 days from the last exposure to the COVID-19 case.</p> <p>Test for COVID-19 (either self-test or at a testing site) 5 days after the exposure.</p> <p>Wear a mask at all times during any activities when around others for an additional 5 days (i.e., through day 10).</p>

Contact Tracing

Because individual-level contact tracing is a tool that becomes less effective when community transmission levels are high, **DPH recommends that schools begin to refocus the activities of health staff away from the investigation of relatively low risk in-school exposures and toward the identification, early isolation, and clinical management of students and staff with active symptoms that could be related to COVID-19.** At this time given: 1) the current very high level of community transmission throughout our state; 2) the experience of Connecticut school districts that have conducted in-person learning throughout the past two years of the pandemic, even in the setting of very high community transmission; 3) the infrequent conversion of close contacts; and 4) the need to prioritize available resources in PreK-12 schools, the position of the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is that **routine contact tracing of individual exposures that occur inside schools or during school-organized and supervised activities can be discontinued** (subject to the conditions and provisions indicated below) without posing a significant increased risk of negative impact on in-school transmission of COVID-19 or access to in-person learning.

Several factors that influence this position include:

- Universal implementation of, and strict compliance with, robust mitigation strategies in all PreK-12 schools in our state.
- Infrequently identified person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 inside school buildings, especially in relation to other activities and environments children are engaging with outside of school.
- Very high numbers of student quarantine days based on individual contact tracing in schools compared to the very low number of school close contacts that become infected.
- Current delays in the receipt of test results due to high testing demand combined with new shortened isolation and quarantine times for individuals make it likely that many students would be outside of their quarantine period by the time contact tracing could be completed.

School districts that opt to discontinue individual-level contact tracing in their PreK-12 schools should ensure that they continue to:

- Enforce **universal masking** rules inside schools (including appropriate exemptions allowed for those individuals who cannot consistently and correctly wear a mask due to medical, developmental, or other appropriate reasons).
- Take steps to ensure that periods of unmasking inside the school (e.g., meal periods) are **as brief and as distanced as possible**.
- **Appropriately notify staff and parents/guardians of students** regarding positive cases occurring in the school population. Examples of appropriate notifications would include classroom-level notifications in lower grades (where classroom groups generally stay together for the duration of the school day), grade-level or “group-level” notifications at the middle-grade levels, school-level notifications in high schools, and notifications to athletic teams, clubs, or other groups as appropriate.