



UPDATES FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in TK-12 Schools

Updates:

December 20, 2021, Parent Ambassador webpage link added

Since November 3, 2021, COVID-19 vaccines are now available to children ages 5 and up.

This document reviews current policies and important action steps to keep children safe in Los Angeles County's 3,040 TK-12 schools. At the end you will find resources you can turn to, including where to call, if you want further information or need assistance with COVID-19 prevention or care.

1. Identifying infected children.

As schools reopen across Los Angeles County, your child's school may require them to take COVID-19 tests on some regular schedule, often weekly. Public Health rules do not require that schools make sure children are tested, but many school districts in the county have plans to test all students or at least all students who are not fully vaccinated every week. Schools are making this effort because they recognize that testing, in addition to masking and other prevention steps, is an important way to protect the safety of children and staff.



Why is testing whole groups of children important?

- Because the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, the strain of the virus that we are now seeing throughout Los Angeles, spreads much more easily from person to person than the version of the virus we dealt with last year.
- Because a person can be infected without having any symptoms. They may be too early in their illness for symptoms to have shown up yet. Or they may be someone who can sail through infection without ever showing symptoms but can spread infection to other people who do end up getting sick.
- Testing becomes more important and helpful when there is a lot of the virus circulating and many infected people in the community, as there are right now. As the presence of the virus becomes lower in the community, testing large groups of people with no symptoms and no special risk factors for infection becomes less useful, and you may see some schools do less student testing as that happens, or stop entirely.

Testing allows schools to identify those who are infected early, notify their parents, and send them home to isolate from others right away to reduce the risk of spread in schools.

- If you are notified that your child has tested positive for COVID-19 or that your child has shown symptoms of COVID-19 while they are in school, the school will contact you right away. You will be asked to arrange to pick-up your child. You will also get information on how to take care of your child and how to protect family and friends from catching your child's infection. Follow the links at the end of this document if you want to know more.

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- While your child is at home you should receive a call from our staff at the Department of Public Health. The person who calls will work with you to figure out where your child may have been exposed to the virus and if there are family, friends or neighbors who might have been exposed through your child.

When you get a call from Public Health, it will show on your phone as “LA Public Health” or 1-833-641-0305. Please be sure to respond to this call so that you can receive important information about caring for your child and others in your family. The Public Health staff person will also explain how long your child will need to remain home and isolated from others.

- If your child has symptoms and tests positive for COVID-19 or if their doctor thinks they have COVID-19, they must stay home until:
 - At least 10 days have passed since their symptoms first started and
 - They do not have a fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers) and
 - Their symptoms improve
- If they test positive for COVID-19 but do not have any symptoms:
 - They must stay home for 10 days after the test was taken, but
 - If they develop symptoms, they need to follow the instructions above

2. Identifying close contacts when there is an infected child.

Once a child has tested positive for COVID-19 and the parents have been informed, the school’s next step is to inform the Department of Public Health. Public Health follows up on every child who tests positive, checking to see who a close contact of that infected child might be. Los Angeles County policy defines a close contact as a person who has been less than 6 feet from the infected child for more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period, or who had direct contact with the infected child’s body fluids and/or secretions (for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing utensils or saliva).



Public Health works with the school to make a list of children and staff who are considered close contacts. We collect enough information to identify those who need to be sent home to quarantine. We are working closely with schools to make sure that all persons who need to quarantine are identified and those who don’t need to quarantine do not miss any additional school days.

Here is what parents need to know about which children do and don’t need to be quarantined

- Your child does NOT need to be quarantined if they are fully vaccinated and have no symptoms. Vaccinated people can still get infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, but this does not happen often, and it is very unlikely to lead to serious illness. People who have not gotten the vaccine remain at much higher risk to catch the virus and to get very sick, compared to people who have taken all their vaccine doses.
 - Make sure your child’s school knows if they are fully vaccinated. Work with your school to provide [proof](#) that they have received their vaccine. This lets the school know that your child can stay in school after an exposure.
 - If your child is age 5 or older but has not gotten a vaccine yet, you can avoid a possible quarantine down the road by getting them vaccinated now. There are hundreds of vaccination sites across the county, including many that are partnering with your school district. Your child’s pediatrician

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can also help arrange a vaccine for your child and answer questions or concerns you have about how vaccines work. For more information about COVID-19 vaccination for your child, see [Vaccine Facts for Parents](#).

- Your child does NOT need to be quarantined if they were never a close contact to the infected person. Being in the same class or grade, or on the same bus does not automatically make your child a close contact. Remember the definition: less than 6 feet for more than 15 minutes over the course of the day or getting directly exposed to the infected person's body fluids and/or secretions.
 - If they sit next to the infected child in one or more classes, they probably do meet the definition of a close contact. The same is true if your child has been close to the infected child in other school settings, like at lunch or during outdoor recess.
- Your child WILL need to quarantine if they are unvaccinated or have illness symptoms and were in close contact to the infected person; this means they were less than 6 feet from the infected person for more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.
- As of October 5, Los Angeles County has aligned with the State of California's modified quarantine recommendation. Modified quarantine makes it possible for children who have been exposed to COVID-19 in the classroom or another school setting to continue attending school as long as certain conditions are met. Adoption of this new policy is based on Public Health's review of evidence from the first month of school, which found that very few children in quarantine end up having COVID-19. For this reason, Modified quarantine is now an option that schools may choose to use for some students. See [LAC DPH Parent Update on Modified Quarantine for TK-12](#).
- Exposed students can end their quarantine early and go back to school after 7 days instead of waiting until after 10 days, if the student takes a COVID-19 test on or after day 5, the test is negative, and the student has not developed any symptoms of COVID-19. If your child does not a negative test on or after day 5, they will need to quarantine for the full 10 days.
- All people exposed to an infected person should monitor themselves for any signs of illness for 14 days from their last exposure to the infected person, since the virus can incubate over 14 days.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health gathers information on school infections and exposures on a day-to-day basis. This information will allow us to decide whether to keep or change the current quarantine policy based on information about how much transmission is occurring at schools.

3. What schools can do and how you can help to reduce K-12 exposures and quarantines.

Public Health has updated last year's policies to allow full in-person enrollment of students in school. This year, the steps all schools MUST take are:

- They must ensure that everyone in the TK-12 setting is masked at all times when indoors except when eating or drinking.
- They must report to Public Health within 24 hours every time there is a positive case identified in the school setting.
- They must report immediately to Public Health every time there are 3 or more cases identified at the same school campus within a 14-day period.



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- They must have a COVID-19 prevention plan that includes an exposure management plan. This plan must be available to the entire school community.

Beyond these requirements, there are additional steps schools can take to reduce spread of COVID-19. These steps can help reduce the number of children who need to quarantine when there is a case identified at the school. These steps include:

- Having students sit in the same seat every day and keeping a seating chart. This simple step helps the school correctly identify which children were within 6 feet of a child who turns out to be infected and limits the number of students who are told they have to go home and quarantine.
- In elementary schools, it helps to arrange for students to eat with the same group of children they sit near in class each day. Again, this reduces the number of exposed children when there is a case.
- Using outdoor settings as often as possible. Natural air circulation makes the outdoors the safest place to be. Schools can hold classes outdoors, permit students to eat lunch outdoors, and use outdoor spaces for physical education and recess.
- Preventing crowding. Schools can increase social distancing wherever possible. School staff can identify times and places where students gather and create crowd control policies to promote a 6-foot distance between children when they are outside the classroom.
- Seating children so that they are facing the same way and as far apart as possible in their classroom. Schools should avoid pod seating that has children face-to-face and right next to each other.
- Having a well-functioning ventilation system with air flowing from the classroom.
- Providing plenty of handwashing or hand-sanitizing stations throughout the school. This makes it easy for students and staff to frequently wash or sanitize their hands.



Your help is needed.

First, if your child's school is missing opportunities to implement some the preventive steps listed above, suggest them to teachers and school administrators.

Second, educate your child about their role in keeping school safe.

- Make sure your child understands the importance of wearing a mask indoors and knows how to wear a mask correctly, so that it fits snugly and covers their face from nose to chin.
- Educate your child about the importance of following school rules around seating, distancing, and avoiding crowds. Make sure your child understands the connection between these behaviors and how they help to prevent spread of the virus.

And if you want to do more, you can sign up for the [DPH Parent Ambassador Program!](#) We provide training and a certificate to parents who want to be educated about COVID-19, how it spreads, its impact on child health, and the ways we can all work to avoid spread. You will be joining a wonderful group of parent leaders who help share the facts about COVID-19 with the whole school community.

Click [here](#) to learn more or email: TK12Ambassador@ph.lacounty.gov

COVID-19 Resources

Los Angeles County: ph.lacounty.gov/coronavirus

CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

Information for people with COVID-19 and their close contacts:

- Isolation Instructions for People with COVID-19: ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation
- Quarantine and Other Instructions for Close Contacts: ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine
- Caring for Someone Sick at Home: [CDC webpage](#)
- For help with finding healthcare or getting essential supplies: Call 2-1-1 or visit 211LA.org

Information on vaccination:

- CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines
- Los Angeles County: [VaccinateLACounty.com](https://vaccinateLACounty.com) or VacunateLosAngeles.com (Spanish)
- To find a free vaccine near you, visit [VaccinateLACounty.com](https://vaccinateLACounty.com) and click on “[How To Get Vaccinated](#)” or call the **DPH Vaccine Call Center** at **833-540-0473**. No appointment is needed at many locations. You do not need insurance and you will not be asked about your immigration status.

Information on prevention for parents and guardians:

- Visit the COVID-19 Resources for Parents and Guardians webpage: ph.lacounty.gov/covidinfoparents. Resources available on this page include: [COVID-19 Prevention in TK-12 schools](#), Masks webpage: ph.lacounty.gov/masks, and [Keeping Safe and Preventing Spread for Parents with Unvaccinated Children](#).