

# COVID-19 Best Practices in K-12 Schools & Higher Education



K-12 schools and higher education should put in place a set of core infectious disease prevention strategies as part of their normal operations. Adding and layering COVID-19-specific prevention strategies that are tied to COVID-19 Community Levels to core disease prevention strategies will allow for a flexible plan that provides optimal protection to staff and students while increasing in-person learning. A comprehensive description of CDC’s layered prevention strategies are described [here](#).

## Major updates to the CDC’s K-12 guidance include:

- It is no longer recommended that schools implement physically distancing strategies such as keeping students 3 feet or 6 feet apart.
- Universal case investigation and contact tracing are not recommended. However, they can be useful strategies in responding to a school outbreak.
  - Case investigation and contact tracing are important components of [Test to Stay](#) (TTS) programs. Schools that implement TTS strategies should continue to conduct contact tracing to allow those identified as close contacts and would otherwise need to quarantine at home to remain in an educational setting for in-person learning.

## Key Best Practices

### Promote COVID-19 Vaccination.

- Staff and students who are eligible to be vaccinated can do so for FREE at their local county health department and many other locations. Review vaccination and booster recommendations [here](#).

### Stay home when sick and get tested.

- Encourage daily [symptom](#) monitoring at home and school. Communicate and enforce the school’s sick policy. This policy should include: 1) when an ill person should be kept home, 2) when an ill person will be sent home from school, and 3) criteria for them to return to school.
- OSDH has developed a symptom assessment tool to help determine when someone should be kept home or sent home from school for **any** communicable disease illness.

“A” Symptoms	“B” Symptoms
Fever > =100.4 F	Nasal Congestion/Stuffy Nose
Sore Throat	Runny Nose
Cough	Muscle/Body Aches
Difficulty Breathing	Fatigue
Diarrhea or Vomiting	Chills
New Loss of Taste or Smell	Nausea
Rash or new unexplained lesions	Loss of Appetite
	Elevated Temperature < 100.4 F
	New Onset of Severe Headache
<b>Recommend staff/student be kept home or sent home if:</b>	
Person has 1 “A” Symptom <b>OR</b> Person has 3 “B” Symptoms	

- Develop leave policies that encourage sick and exposed staff or students to stay home and get tested, when appropriate.
- Five full days of isolation at home is recommended for COVID-19. The day 0 count begins on the first day of symptoms. If no symptoms are present, the day 0 count begins on the day the positive test was collected. After leaving isolation, it is recommended to wear a mask in public for an additional 5 days. If a mask is unable to be worn, 10 days of isolation at home is recommended. Find OSDH isolation guidance along with calculators [here](#).

Encourage [consistent and correct mask use](#) when [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) are high.

Consider [cohorting](#) student/staff when [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) are high.

**Develop and communicate a written protocol for notifying exposed contacts.**

- Close contacts should be provided with information to understand their risk, how to monitor themselves for symptoms, and what steps they can take to reduce the risk of transmission within the school setting, such as: [quarantine](#), testing, and wearing a mask, depending on their vaccination and booster status or history of prior infection in the past 90 days. Find OSDH quarantine guidance along with calculators [here](#). If quarantine is not possible, consider implementing a [Test to Stay \(TTS\)](#) program.

**Implement in-school testing programs to help keep school open to in-person learning.**

- Enroll in the [Oklahoma Schools COVID-19 Prevention Program](#). This grant funded program provides financial and resource support to schools to reduce COVID-19 transmission. It provides [screening testing](#) to help schools with early detection of COVID-19 in people who are asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic, or mildly symptomatic. [Onsite COVID-19 Testing Recommendations for Schools](#) summarizes testing types and provides suggestions for prioritizing rapid antigen testing supplies if they become limited. [Resources for Oklahoma Schools](#) provides other helpful links and contact information.
- If schools are conducting point-of-care COVID-19 testing on school grounds (school-based testing), all results are required to be reported to the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH). The designated reporting process for school-based testing is via the State Infection Reporting System (SIRS) which is located in OSDE Single Sign-On. Please contact Dean Hupp at [dhupp@e2inttech.com](mailto:dhupp@e2inttech.com) for information or to register for access to SIRS.

**Enroll in [Operation Expanded Testing](#).**

- This federal program provides schools with access to free and timely PCR testing that can be done with the schools existing staff; no medical staff are needed. A CLIA license is not required since testing is conducted at an offsite lab.

**Encourage parents and staff to participate in OSDH's COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing program.**

- Learn more about the program [here](#). Oklahoma residents with cell phones can receive their test results through a text message and complete their own investigation through an online survey. This online survey process provides users with isolation and quarantine recommendations as well as access to exclusion and return letters. Case investigators are still available to interview individuals who prefer to speak to someone on the phone, answer questions, and help with reported outbreaks: (405) 522-0001.

**Continue to:**

- **Implement** layered prevention strategy to reduce risk of COVID-19 in school settings.
- **Encourage** [handwashing and respiratory etiquette](#).
- **Maintain** clean and healthy facilities. [Cleaning](#), [Disinfecting](#), [Ventilation](#)

**Who to Contact:**

- Contact your local [County Health Department](#) or (405) 522–0001 with questions, concerns, or support for controlling COVID-19 within your schools or if you have an unusual exposure situation.
  
- Use the free resources the CDC has created for schools.
  - [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#)
  - [School Testing for COVID-19 Toolkit](#)
  - [School Toolkit for Responding to COVID-19 Cases](#)
  - [Ventilation in Schools and Childcare Programs](#) *(including an Interactive School Ventilation Tool)*
  - [Frequently Asked Questions for K-12 and Early Care and Education \(ECE\) Settings](#)
  - [Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education](#)
  
- For questions about ordering COVID test kits from OSDH, please email: [osdh.covidtesting@health.ok.gov](mailto:osdh.covidtesting@health.ok.gov)