

# COVID-19 Update

*Health experts tell us that no single tool is going to stop the pandemic. However, we can all do our part to slow COVID-19 transmission. The best protection from COVID-19—for yourself and others—will be a combination of strategies, including getting a COVID-19 vaccination if eligible, wearing a mask, maintaining distance when you can, staying home when ill, and washing your hands often. GCPS requires masks in all facilities and on our buses, and will continue to employ established mitigation efforts.*

## School district requires masks for students, staff, and visitors

While teaching and learning is the core business of Gwinnett County Public Schools, the health and safety of our students and staff is our key focus, particularly during the pandemic. The district's mitigation efforts include a number of tools, including vaccinations, masks, and other safety measures.

Although vaccines effectively prevent severe disease and hospitalization, they don't stop every infection, and about half of our students—those under the age of 12—are not yet eligible.

Based on CDC recommendations, GCPS opened the school year with a mask requirement for all students, staff, and visitors to our facilities and on the bus. Masks that have an exhalation valve or vent and masks made from mesh fabrics are not recommended by the CDC as they allow virus particles to escape and spread. As a result, these types of masks do not meet GCPS' mask requirement.

**While masks are required, mask breaks occur...**

- During meals;
- During outdoor activities, including teacher-directed PE (also called recess);
- When doing physical activity like cardio exercises, etc., in PE, or athletic practice or competition;
- During band when playing instruments; and

**Team GCPS is working to keep our students and staff safe and healthy and our schools open for in-person learning. We appreciate our partners... at home and in the community.**

- In class when a student or teacher needs a “mini” break. (They may remove their mask and put it back on after a few minutes.)

**There are situations when accommodations to our mask requirement may be provided...** We understand that some of our students with disabilities are unable to wear a mask for extended periods and accommodations will be made for these students.

In addition, students and employees who have medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult and who provide medical documentation from a doctor may go without a mask during part of the day. However, these individuals still will

need to wear masks or face coverings during certain parts of the day (on the bus, in hallways, in common areas, etc.).

Students participating in athletic practices and events are not required to wear a mask. However, GCPS strongly encourages mask use by visitors attending outdoor events/activities. Visitors/spectators for indoor events will need to wear a mask.

**The district will continue to monitor current conditions and updates to guidance, using this information to make changes to its mask requirement and other mitigation strategies during the 2021–22 school year as needed.**

## MOBILE Walk-In Vaccination Clinics in Gwinnett County Public Schools



GCPS encourages our community to learn more about **COVID-19 vaccinations** and take advantage of opportunities to get vaccinated. The district is partnering with the Gwinnett Health Department to host vaccination clinics at high schools around the county. Check the district website for upcoming clinics. **No appointment is necessary.** This opportunity is available to anyone eligible for the vaccine, ages 12 and older. Students ages 12 to 17 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Interpreters will be on site. For more information on COVID vaccinations, go to the health department website at <https://www.gnrhealth.com/>.

*This is a fluid situation and can change. Information in this PDF was updated after the issue went to print.*

# Together, we can keep students *in* school (and *out* of quarantine)

It's important to know how mitigation strategies such as proper masking and vaccinations help keep students in school and learning in person.

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) students and staff are back to school, with more than 97% of our students attending classes in person. Keeping students in class and learning is a key focus as our school communities come together to support our students in the third school year affected by the global pandemic.

However, health officials report a surge of COVID-19 cases in Georgia. In GCPS, layered mitigation strategies at our schools and other facilities, including mask requirements and increasing vaccination rates, are helping to keep our quarantine numbers down.

## *So, what factors determine quarantine status for a student who is exposed to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19?*

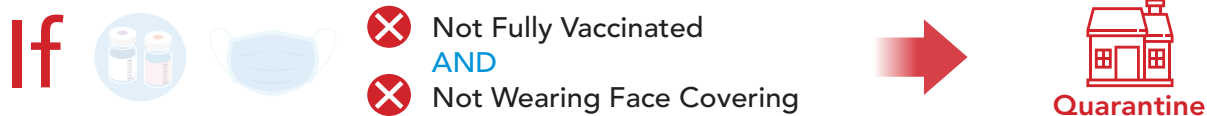
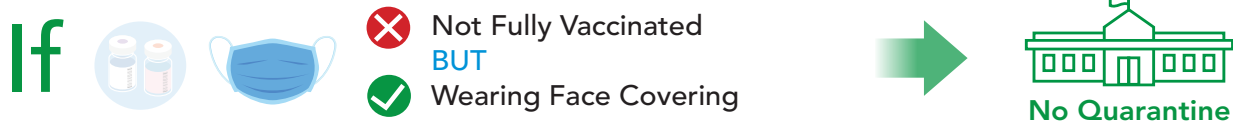
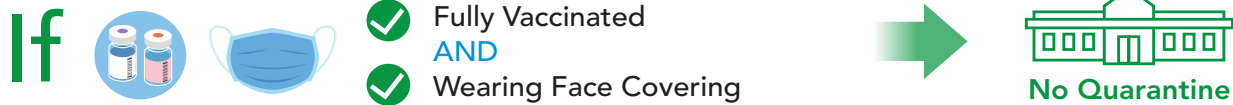
In the graphic below, check out several different scenarios for a student who has no symptoms but has been in contact with an individual at school who has tested positive for COVID-19 *and* was wearing a face covering during the time of exposure.

Note that quarantine requirements for students who are close contacts with the infected individual would vary, based on their vaccination status and mask use.

## About close contacts...

Close contacts include anyone who spent 15 minutes or more at a distance of 6 feet or less with the positive person during their infectious period. There are situations when masks may not be required.

### Student Close Contact at School



### Student Close Contact at Home

An unvaccinated individual identified as a close contact to a confirmed or probable case at home (outside of the school setting) is required to quarantine, due to regular unmasked exposure.



## Quarantine in GCPS

[Quarantine](#) is an important tool for public health officials, ensuring that someone who is exposed—and has the potential to become ill—does not expose others to the virus.

The CDC recommends that close contacts quarantine for 14 days and self-monitor for symptoms. Individuals who start to have symptoms during their quarantine should immediately isolate and get tested.

When would a student or staff member **NOT** have to quarantine at home? If any of the following apply:

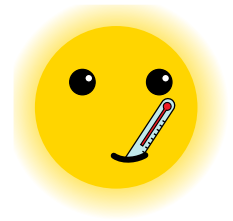
- Fully vaccinated (two weeks or more after final dose of vaccine received);
- Tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days, prior to becoming a contact; or
- The student or staff member who was a confirmed or probable case and the close contact(s) were **both**

wearing masks for a majority of the school day, and the exposure occurred at school. (In this scenario close contact(s) only applies to students who are close contacts.)

**While in quarantine, students continue learning asynchronously, accessing their assignments through eCLASS or through materials provided by their teacher.**

# Families play important role in containing spread of COVID-19

Public health officials are seeing more COVID-19 infection in children and young people as the delta variant gets a foothold in our community. One way that families can help contain the spread of COVID-19 is by screening their student's health each morning before their child leaves for the bus stop or jumps in the car for the ride to school. Here are the questions to ask every day:



1. Does your student have a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher?
2. Does your student display any other symptoms or signs of illness?



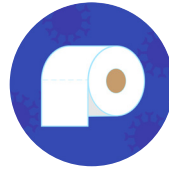
Congestion or Runny Nose



Cough



Short of Breath or Difficulty Breathing



Diarrhea



Headache



Muscle Pain and Fatigue



Sore Throat



Nausea or Vomiting



Chills



New Loss of Taste or Smell

## About individuals who are positive for COVID 19...

Isolation is required for those who test positive for COVID-19. Isolation keeps someone who is infected with the virus away from others. Positive individuals with symptoms should isolate for at least 10 days and be 24 hours fever-free, without the aid of fever-reducing medications, and all other symptoms should have improved. Positive individuals without symptoms should isolate for 10 days from first positive test date.

3. While away from school, was your student in close contact—within 6 feet for 15 minutes, with or without mask—with someone with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 (lab or diagnosis) in the last two weeks, or someone getting a test or waiting for test results?
4. Is your child getting a test or waiting for test results?

If you answer YES to any of these questions, DO NOT SEND YOUR STUDENT TO SCHOOL. Instead, call the school to report your student's illness or possible exposure. You will be advised to isolate your sick child from others and seek medical care and testing if appropriate. Self-quarantine will be advised for anyone who has been exposed to COVID-19 but has no symptoms.

## CDC Recommended 14-Day Quarantine

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

- Quarantine Start Date
- Test On or After Day 5 of Quarantine
- Last Day of 14-Day Quarantine CDC Recommended
- Last Day of Quarantine IF No Symptoms and Negative Test On or After Day 5 (7-Day Quarantine)
- Last Day of Quarantine IF No Symptoms and no test was taken (10-Day Quarantine)

## Keeping students in school and out of quarantine...

Families can help by reinforcing proper and consistent mask use, vaccinating eligible students ages 12 and older, and helping to reduce community exposure by following CDC guidance for masks indoors and with large groups when outdoors (especially for unvaccinated children).

# GCPS to pilot COVID testing in Norcross Cluster

Schools in the **Norcross Cluster** will be piloting a COVID-19 testing program this fall. Routine COVID-19 testing (also called surveillance testing) can quickly detect individuals who are positive with COVID-19 and trace contacts who should quarantine. Acting as an “early warning system,” the testing program will help lower the risk of transmission in schools so that in-person instruction can continue without interruption.

Participation in the pilot will be voluntary. Families must opt in to the program, which will include weekly testing for participating students and staff. Student athletes will be tested twice weekly. The free testing, which is self-administered with a nasal swab, is quick and easy, and is not painful or invasive.

Rapid antigen tests provide results in 15 minutes. Should a student or staff member test positive while at school, the school’s Health Response Team would act quickly to isolate the COVID-positive individual.

“The COVID-19 testing pilot in the Norcross Cluster will serve as a proactive step in slowing the spread in our schools and communities, allowing GCPS to continue providing in-person instruction during the pandemic,” says **Dr. Al Taylor**, associate superintendent for School Improvement and Operations.

District leaders plan to review data from the pilot with an eye to expanding the voluntary opportunity throughout the district.



Fall 2021 Update  
[www.gcpsk12.org](http://www.gcpsk12.org)  
Current 9/22/21

## Did you know?

### You can find current COVID stats on the district website



To keep parents and employees informed, we are providing information every school day about the number of students and staff affected by COVID in each school building/location. The report includes the number of positive cases, suspected cases, and close contacts, by school and location. To learn more, go to <https://bit.ly/GCPSC-19Stats>.

### Vaccination status affects international travelers

As families plan travel for upcoming breaks, it’s important to know that GCPS follows CDC guidelines when it comes to international travel. The CDC recommends that unvaccinated travelers (including children) get tested for COVID-19 within 3 to 5 days after returning AND self-quarantine at home for a full 7 days after travel. Vaccinated travelers and those who have recently recovered from COVID (within the last three months) are not required to quarantine, but should monitor for symptoms for 14 days after travel. To learn more, go to <https://bit.ly/GCPSIntlTravel>.



### Cleaning protocols, HVAC updates help minimize transmission

GCPS custodians follow established protocols to clean, sanitize, and disinfect buildings, and high-touch surfaces and objects, including tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, toilets, sinks, and handrails. In the classroom, students and staff have access to hand sanitizer, and supplies are available for staff members to clean and sanitize surfaces as needed. Over the past year, GCPS has upgraded ventilation systems. Air filters are a higher MERV-13 grade and are changed out quarterly. We’ve increased the run time of HVAC equipment in our buildings, per CDC and ASHRAE recommendations. Automated systems have been modified to override sensors so that HVAC systems can run, regardless of room occupancy. GCPS continues with school HVAC replacements using ionization equipment. These steps are helping to minimize the potential airborne transmission of the virus in our buildings.

### What happens when a positive COVID case is identified?

Families are responsible for notifying their child’s school immediately if a student tests positive or is diagnosed with COVID-19 and the student should be kept at home. Should a student become ill at school, the ill child is isolated from others and the family is notified. Here’s the identification and notification process for ill students and those with whom they have close contact.

- **Track and Report Cases**— Each school has a trained Health Response Team (HRT). Members of the HRT enter information about the positive case into the district’s secure tracking tool. This information is reported to the Gwinnett County Health Department as required.
- **Notify Parents/Guardians and Staff**— If the student who tested positive had been at school, the school’s HRT identifies close contacts who need to quarantine—both students and staff members. Information/recommendations from the health department are shared, including when quarantined contacts may return to school and work. Notification also is sent to families of students in the class or who ride the same bus with the ill person—even if their child doesn’t have to quarantine— alerting them to the case. This notification letter is sent by SchoolMessenger.
- **Report to the Community**— GCPS posts key data related to cases and close contacts on the school district [website](#) every school day.