



COVID-19 Protocols and Practices

for the 2021-2022 School Year

Updated December 10, 2021



Introduction

In order to secure the safety and protection of children and their families across the state due to the growing COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Cooper, in collaboration with the NC State Board of Education (NCSBE) and the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), closed public school buildings for in-person instruction through executive order on March 14, 2020 for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Recognizing the growing harms to children who were out of school and relying solely on remote instruction, including negative impacts on academic success, student mental health, and food insecurity, Onslow County Schools determined to return students to full-time in-person instruction safely and to the greatest extent possible for the 2020-2021 school year. This strategy was supported by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) which stated, "It is critical for schools to open as safely and as soon as possible, and remain open, to achieve the benefits of in-person learning and key support services."

Onslow County Schools believes decisions involving COVID-19 protocols that affect our students, their families, our staff, and the community in general are most appropriately made at the local level. Local school officials are able to make the most informed decisions based on local trends and data and can more easily react as local conditions indicate. Onslow County Schools is committed to providing students and staff with a safe, secure, and healthy high quality in-person learning environment. This document describes the protocols and procedures Onslow County Schools will use to guide those efforts.



What We Know About COVID

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ways in which COVID-19 is transmitted and its effects have become much better understood. COVID-19 is mostly spread by respiratory droplets released when people talk, cough, or sneeze. Though much more unlikely, the virus may spread to hands from a contaminated surface and then to the nose or mouth, causing infection. That is why personal prevention practices, such as staying home when sick, proper hand washing, and appropriate cleaning of commonly used surfaces are important practices in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. However, we are learning more every day about the COVID-19 risk in school settings. Research indicates children generally experience milder symptoms with COVID-19 than adults, and, to date, have not been found to contribute substantially to the spread of the virus.

Symptoms of COVID-19 may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19 or another contagious illness and should stay home from school in accordance with established Onslow County Board of Education Policy:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea or vomiting

**If you are sick, PLEASE
stay home!**

This list is not all possible symptoms. Other more general symptoms have been reported, including fatigue, muscle or body aches, sore throat, headache, congestion or runny nose. Children, adolescents, and adults with the virus that causes COVID-19 may experience any, all, or none of these symptoms.

Onslow County Schools recognizes COVID-19 is a serious disease and its effects are not to be taken lightly. However, as it relates to schools and the health and safety of our students and staff, it is important to note:

- There is little evidence that schools have contributed to increased rates of community transmission; countries that have reopened their schools have not seen large rises in infection at a population level.
- Overall, studies in the US and internationally have demonstrated limited disease transmission from child-to-child and very limited to no transmission from child-to-adult in the in-person school setting.
- North Carolina's ABC Science Collaborative found rates of secondary transmission during in-person school instruction significantly less than the surrounding communities and no cases of student to staff transmission.

**Health officials recommend all eligible persons get
vaccinated against COVID-19**



Vaccinations

Immunization against COVID-19 is one of the best measures available to protect staff and age-appropriate students from COVID-19 illness. Health officials encourage all eligible persons to get vaccinated against COVID-19, but Onslow County Schools does not require this vaccination. Those considering getting the COVID-19 vaccination should consult with their health care provider in order to make an informed decision that is best for them and their family.

COVID-19 vaccines are available to everyone 12 and older at almost 40 locations across Onslow County. To find a vaccine location visit covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

Face Coverings

During their November 9, 2021, meeting, the OCS Board of Education unanimously approved making face coverings optional for all students, staff, and visitors to OCS facilities effective Monday, November 15, 2021.

Due to federal guidelines, OCS will continue requiring face coverings on all OCS transportation until further notice. The face covering requirement will be reconsidered by the Board as required by General Statute.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your household and using this strategy can help decrease the spread of COVID-19. Where feasible, at least three feet of distance between K-12 students when indoors is recommended. If possible, at least six feet of distance is recommended between adults (teachers and staff) and between adults and students.

Transportation

Face coverings will be mandatory on all Onslow County Schools buses, vans, and other district-owned student transportation. School district transportation vehicles will be cleaned regularly. Children must not be present when a vehicle is being cleaned. Special care will be given when cleaning frequently touched surfaces in the vehicle (e.g., surfaces in the driver's cockpit, hard seats, arm rests, door handles, seat belt buckles, light and air controls, doors and windows, and grab handles) prior to morning routes and prior to afternoon routes. Students who become sick during the school day will not be permitted to use group transportation to return home.



Middle and High School Athletics

All middle and high school athletes will adhere to the North Carolina High School Athletic Association's rules and regulations and Onslow County protocols. When competing outside Onslow County, athletic teams will comply with the home team's face covering requirements.

Cleaning and Hygiene

The risk of being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 through contaminated surfaces or objects is considered to be low. However, regular cleaning with a solution that contains soap or detergent reduces the amount of germs on surfaces and further decreases risk of infection from surfaces. Personal hygiene practices such as proper hand washing also reduces the risk of infection. Schools will be provided adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors (e.g., soap, hand sanitizer for safe use by staff and students.) Surfaces will be cleaned regularly, prioritizing high-touch surfaces.



If a person has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, staff will clean and disinfect the areas frequented by that person using an EPA approved disinfectant for the virus that causes COVID-19.



Schools will continue to reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or the safe use of hand sanitizer by staff and students during important times such as before, during, and after preparing food, before eating, after using the toilet, after blowing one's nose, coughing or sneezing, and after play. Staff and students will be encouraged to cough and sneeze into their elbows, or to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue.

Coping and Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be incredibly stressful. Fear and anxiety about the disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. The pandemic-related school closures have deprived students of many of the protective factors associated with regular school attendance. Schools can play an important role in helping students and staff cope and build resilience to support the well-being of the school community.

Schools should provide teachers, staff, families, and students (if age-appropriate) with information on how to access resources for mental health and wellness and encourage them to talk to someone they trust about how they are feeling. Schools should promote self-care strategies such as eating healthy, exercising, getting an appropriate amount of sleep, and finding time to unwind. While it is important to remain informed with the most accurate, up-to-date information, teachers, staff and students should be encouraged to take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories about COVID-19 if they are feeling overwhelmed or distressed.

Monitoring for Symptoms and Handling Suspected, Presumptive, or Confirmed Positive Cases of COVID-19

It is extremely important if a staff member or student is sick that they do not come to school and risk exposing others to their illness. Onslow County Board of Education Policy 4230.5 – Short Term Communicable Diseases describes certain symptoms which generally suggest a staff member or student has an infectious illness and should not attend school, regardless if the illness is suspected to be COVID-19.

Occurrence of any of the symptoms below while a student, teacher, or other staff member is at school suggests the person may be referred for diagnostic COVID-19 testing.

- Fever (temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher)
- New persistent cough (for people with chronic cough due to allergies or asthma, a change in their cough from baseline)
- Difficulty breathing (for people with asthma, a change from their baseline breathing)
- New loss of taste or smell

Onslow County Schools will continue to report to local health authorities any suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases among children and staff (as required by NCGS § 130A-136) to allow for appropriate contact tracing. If directed by Local Health Department, Onslow County Schools will coordinate with health officials to provide contact information for close contacts of a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case among staff, students, and families while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with FERPA, NCGS § 130A-143, and all other state and federal laws.

The criteria for return to school after a diagnosis of COVID-19 or after a close contact with a person with COVID-19 can be found in Appendix A.

Appendix A
Exclusion Recommendations for Suspected or Confirmed Positive Cases of COVID-19

<p>COVID-19 Symptoms: Fever, new persistent cough*, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, new loss of taste or smell</p> <p>*For people with chronic cough due to allergies or asthma, a change in their cough from baseline</p>	<p>Individual should be tested for COVID-19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If test result is negative OR a doctor’s note provides an alternate diagnosis, return to school after 24 hours fever free and improved respiratory symptoms • If test result is positive or individual is unable/refuses to get tested, they may return to school after: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 24 hours with no fever and ○ Improvement in symptoms and ○ 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared 	
<p>Positive COVID-19 Test (PCR or Rapid Antigen*)</p> <p>*If a person with no symptoms receives a positive antigen test result and a follow-up PCR test given within 48 hours is negative, the antigen result will be considered a false positive and the person may return immediately as long as they have not been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.</p>	<p>With Symptoms</p> <p>Student/Staff may return to school after:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 hours with no fever and • Improvement in symptoms and • 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared 	<p>Without Symptoms*</p> <p>Student/Staff may return to school after:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 days after the date of testing has passed <p>If symptoms develop within 10 days, follow protocol for a positive COVID-19 test with symptoms.</p> <p>*Vaccinated persons who test positive for COVID-19 are still subject to quarantine from school</p>
<p>Close Contact*</p> <p>*Within three to six feet of a person confirmed positive for COVID-19 for at least 15 cumulative minutes</p> <p>Contact tracing includes people considered close contacts as much as 48 hours prior to an infected person’s COVID symptom onset or diagnosis.</p>	<p>With Symptoms</p> <p>Individual should be tested for COVID-19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If test result is positive or individual is unable/refuses to get tested, may return to school after: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 24 hours with no fever and ○ Improvement in symptoms and ○ 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared 	<p>Without Symptoms</p> <p>Student/staff member is to be excluded from school for quarantine. While a 14-day quarantine is recommended, the quarantine can end 10 days after exposure without testing as long as the close contact remains symptom free.</p> <p>Symptoms should be monitored for 14 days. If symptoms develop within that time, follow guidance for close contact with symptoms.</p>

Individuals DO NOT need to quarantine after exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 if they meet any of the following criteria:

- They are fully vaccinated (it has been at least two weeks following receipt of the second dose in a two-dose series, or at least two weeks following receipt of one dose of a single dose vaccine) and they have remained asymptomatic since the COVID 19 exposure **OR**
- They have tested positive for COVID-19 up to 90 days prior to the exposure **OR**
- They test positive for COVID-19 antibodies within 90 days prior to or immediately after the exposure and do not have symptoms, **OR**
- Both individuals were masked during the exposure.

This is not an all-inclusive list. Please refer to the [StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit](#) for more detailed information.