



COVID-19

Overview of COVID-19 Isolation for K-12 Schools

Updated Dec. 8, 2021

What is isolation?

Isolation is separating people who have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 from those who are not infected or showing symptoms in order to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. You isolate when you show symptoms of COVID-19 or are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, even if you don't have [symptoms](#). Isolation is different from [quarantine](#). Quarantine is used by someone who has been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 but has not tested positive for COVID-19 and does not have symptoms. Quarantine is important because even before a person has tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms, they could spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to other people without knowing. Quarantine is used to prevent transmission of the virus by ensuring that unvaccinated people who have been in [close contact](#) with someone with COVID-19 stay apart from others. If people have symptoms and/or have a positive [viral test](#) for COVID-19 while in quarantine, they should immediately begin the process for isolation.

Who needs to isolate?

People who are confirmed to have COVID-19 or are showing symptoms of COVID-19 need to isolate. This includes people who are not fully vaccinated and [fully vaccinated](#) people. More specifically,

- People who have a [positive viral test](#) for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they have [symptoms](#), need to isolate.
- People with [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, including people who are awaiting test results or are not tested, need to isolate. People with symptoms should isolate even if they do not know if they have been in contact with another person who has COVID-19.

How long should a student or staff member with COVID-19 isolate?

People can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 for a full 10 days from when they develop symptoms, even if they are feeling better. People who have tested positive, but do not have symptoms may spread the virus before they have symptoms or even spread the virus if they never have symptoms at all. For this reason, isolation should last at least 10 days. Day 0 is the day symptoms began or the day the person took a test that had a positive result. Day 1 is the day after symptoms began or, if a person does not have symptoms, the day after the person tested positive (use the date the test was collected).

When can a student or staff member be around others (end isolation) after they are diagnosed with COVID-19?

A person diagnosed with COVID-19 can be around others when

- at least 10 days have passed since their symptoms began, or since the date of their initial positive test (use the date the test was collected) if they did not develop symptoms and

- if they had a fever, at least 24 hours have passed since the resolution of their fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- other symptoms have improved.*

**Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation.*

These recommendations **do not** apply to people with severe COVID-19 or with weakened immune systems (immunocompromised). Consult with a healthcare provider for their recommendations. If the person meets the criteria listed below, that person can go back into public spaces, including school, on day 11.

What should a student or staff member do during isolation?

A person who was asked to isolate because they have tested positive for COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should take the following steps:

- Stay home from school and all other extra-curricular activities, as well as community events, social gatherings, etc. that take place with anyone that is not in their household.
- Monitor their [symptoms](#). If they develop an [emergency warning sign](#) seek emergency medical care immediately. Emergency warning signs include trouble breathing; persistent pain or pressure in the chest; new confusion; the inability to wake up or stay awake; and pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds (depending on skin tone).
- [Clean and disinfect](#) high touch surfaces in the area of the home where they are isolating.
- Avoid contact with other members of the household and pets by staying in a separate room and using a separate bathroom if possible.
- Avoid sharing personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils.
- [Wear a mask](#) when around other people, including around others in the household.

CDC provides more information about what to do during isolation on its web page, [What to Do If You Are Sick](#).

Can a student or staff member come to school while in isolation?

No. It is very important that a student or staff member not attend in-person school while in isolation. Schools should offer remote learning options for students who cannot attend in-person school or provide packets of learning materials for offline instruction. Consult with school officials about the best way for students to receive instruction and continue learning while they are in isolation.

What activities can a student or staff member participate in while in isolation?

A student or staff member can participate in any online or virtual school activities during their isolation period, assuming they feel well enough to do so. They may be able to complete aspects of work or assignments from home during this time, depending on how well they feel. They can engage with other students, teachers, or staff through phone conversations, online meetings, or other virtual/remote engagement.

It is important for a student or staff member in isolation to remain at home, separated from other people as much as possible, even if they do not have symptoms. They should not attend in-person school or other extra-curricular or social activities while they are in isolation. They should not participate in activities like sporting events, play dates, parties, social and family gatherings, music or theater performances, and other events where they may come into contact with other people. To prevent other people from possibly getting COVID-19, make every effort to limit contact between the person in isolation and other people, including other household members, during the isolation period. Even if the person in isolation is wearing a mask, contact with other people should be limited.

- › [When to Isolate](#)
- › [Test for Current Infection](#)
- › [How to Protect Yourself & Others](#)
- › [COVID-19 Contact Tracing](#)
- › [What to Do If You Are Sick](#)

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