



## COVID-19

# What You Should Know About COVID-19 Testing in Schools

Updated Dec. 17, 2021

As schools go back to in-person learning, some may offer regular COVID-19 testing for students and staff. This means testing is offered regularly, even for people who don't have [symptoms](#) of COVID-19. Many schools will also offer testing for people with symptoms of COVID-19 or who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

## Regular COVID-19 Testing Protects Everyone

Regular testing, in addition to COVID-19 [vaccination](#), is a safe, effective way to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and help keep schools open for in-person learning. Many people with COVID-19, especially children and teens, don't have symptoms but can still spread the virus, so regular testing helps find people who have the virus before it can spread to others. This is especially important for children who are not yet vaccinated against COVID-19, families, and staff with younger children at home, and others who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 or are otherwise at risk for getting seriously sick from COVID-19. Finding who has the virus early means steps can be taken to prevent COVID-19 from spreading and causing an outbreak, so schools can stay open. Regular testing also means parents or guardians get notified if their child tests positive, allowing them to plan for treatment and take steps to protect the rest of the family from COVID-19.

Regular testing will help keep students in the classroom and allows them to take part in the other activities they love.

## COVID-19 Tests are Free, Quick, and Easy

The tests are free, quick, and easy and will tell if students or staff have the virus, even if they do not have symptoms.

Schools may choose to use either a nasal test, using a swab for the lower part of the inner nostril, or a saliva test, which takes a saliva (spit) sample. The nasal test is not painful and does **not** use the longer swab that reaches higher into the nose.

Staff will not be tested without consent. Students will not be tested without the consent of both the student and their guardian.

## If a Student or Staff Member Tests Positive

If someone at school tests positive for COVID-19, they will be asked to stay home. Anyone who tests positive will also be asked about people they have been around so that everyone who has been exposed can be notified. People who have been exposed may also need to stay home, depending on whether they are fully vaccinated, and follow the school's policies. When someone tests positive, having them stay home until they no longer have the virus makes sure the virus doesn't spread to others at school, preventing an outbreak and keeping schools open.

Learn more about [when to quarantine or isolate](#).

## Test to Stay

Test to Stay combines [contact tracing](#) and [serial testing](#) (testing that is repeated at least twice during a seven-day period post-exposure) to allow asymptomatic school-associated [close contacts](#) who are not fully vaccinated and do not test positive for SARS-CoV-2 to continue in-person learning. Because fully vaccinated close contacts are not required to quarantine following

exposure, they would not be included in Test to Stay. Students who participate in Test to Stay should consistently and correctly wear masks while in school and should stay home and [isolate](#) if they develop symptoms or test positive for SARS-CoV-2. In the [studies](#) done in Illinois and California, both the person with COVID-19 and the close contact had to be properly masked at the time of exposure to qualify for Test to Stay. If schools are considering implementing Test to Stay, they should also have robust contact tracing in place and access to testing resources (for example, testing supplies and personnel to conduct testing, or access to an existing community testing site), among other layered prevention strategies. Testing frequency can vary (for example, from twice in a seven-day period to daily), but more frequent testing can more quickly identify students who become infected with SARS-CoV-2 and need to [isolate](#).

Schools may consider Test to Stay as an option for keeping asymptomatic school-associated close contacts who are not fully vaccinated and do not test positive for SARS-CoV-2 in the classroom as an alternative to traditional quarantine at home. Because Test to Stay can be resource intensive, it may not be a viable option for every school. School district administrators and local public health agencies should make efforts to ensure that such strategies, if offered, are available in an equitable way among students and across schools and comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including those related to privacy and confidentiality. Administrators should ensure that students who are [isolating](#) or in [quarantine](#) at home have adequate access to remote learning options and that they and their families receive support and follow-up to promote learning and minimize disruption.

Some states and local jurisdictions offer publicly available plans and protocols that describe how they conduct Test to Stay. Their plans may include eligibility criteria for and duration of in-school monitoring, testing type, how often to test, and other relevant considerations. Contact your state or local health department or visit their website to learn more about whether Test to Stay is being implemented in your area.

Related Pages

› [K-12 Schools Guidance](#)


› [Testing Strategies for SARS-CoV-2](#)


› [Considerations for Case Investigation and Contact Tracing in K-12 Schools and Institutions of Higher Education \(IHEs\)](#)


› [Types of Masks](#)


› [Vaccines for COVID-19](#)


More Information


[Open and Safe Schools](#) 

[Understanding the Value and Feasibility of Routine COVID-19 Testing in Schools](#) 

[New Evidence for Safely Reopening K-12 Schools: Testing Can Reduce Infections and Increase Confidence](#) 

[Rockefeller’s K-12 Playbook](#) 

[Case Study Video](#) 

[When to Test – COVID-19 Testing Impact Calculator](#) 

[When to Test – K-12 Playbook](#) 