



## COVID-19

# Operation Expanded Testing

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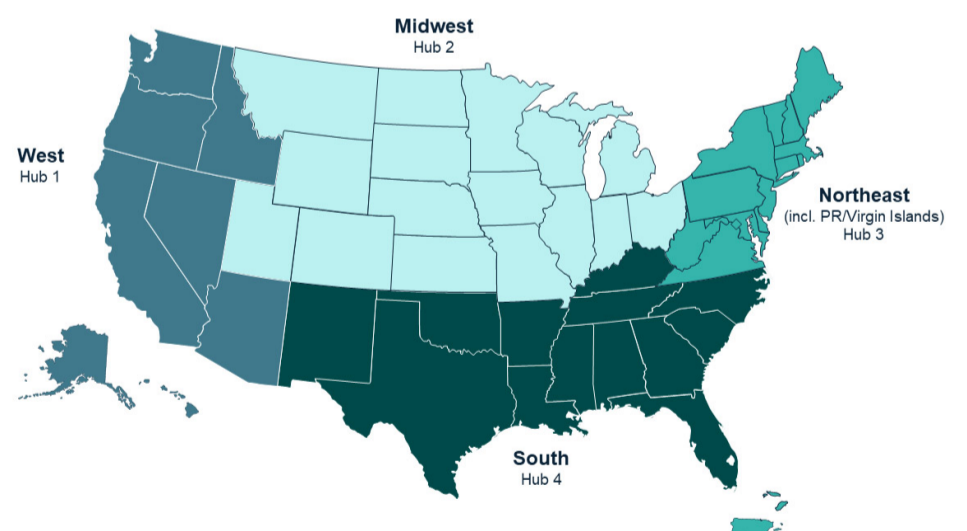
In addition to COVID-19 vaccination, physical distancing, and masking, testing is a safe and effective way to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Expanded testing helps to create a safe learning environment for children in U.S. schools and decreases the risk of disease transmission in congregate settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Operation Expanded Testing (OpET) program increases access to testing nationwide, especially for communities that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. OpET provides no-cost testing to child care centers, [K-12 schools](#), historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), under-resourced communities, and congregate settings, such as homeless shelters, domestic violence and abuse shelters, non-federal correctional facilities, and other qualified sites. OpET can perform millions of tests through July 1, 2022. These contractor-provided laboratory services include specimen collection supplies, shipping materials, laboratory testing, and results reporting. The recipient sites contribute staff to collect specimens.

## Enroll Your Facility into Operation Expanded Testing Today

To enroll your facility into OpET's no-cost [screening testing](#) program, follow these steps.

1. **Identify** your facility's region and coordination hub.
2. **Visit** your regional coordination hub's website.
  1. [Hub 1 – West](#)
  2. [Hub 2 – Midwest](#)
  3. [Hubs 3 & 4 – Northeast & South](#)
3. **Enroll** your school, child care center, shelter, or other congregate setting.



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## Questions

Who can participate in the program?

OpET supports no-cost school-based testing for K-12 students and congregate settings in communities that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The program is available to child care centers, K-12 schools, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and congregate settings, such as homeless shelters, domestic violence and abuse

shelters, non-federal correctional facilities, and other qualified sites. Contact your regional coordination hub to see if your

### What is the cost to participate?

Testing under OpET is no-cost to facilities. OpET is responsible for sample collection supplies, shipping materials, laboratory testing and results reporting. To participate, facilities need to work with their regional coordination hub to enroll, complete training, and provide staff to collect the specimens.

### What type of COVID-19 tests are used in the program?

OpET regional coordination hubs primarily provide laboratory-based [nucleic acid amplification tests](#) (NAATs) that use nasal swab collection kits. Saliva sample collection is available in the Midwest region through Battelle. Eurofins (Northeast and South regions) and Battelle (Midwest) offer [pooled](#) NAAT testing. Pools testing positive will be automatically retested using individual specimens to determine individual positives.

### How are samples collected?

Sample collection varies by region. All hubs conduct PCR tests through anterior nasal swabs. Hub 2 also collects saliva specimens for those between 3-5 years of age.

### Who collects samples at the site?

The organization or site manages specimen collection and provides staff to do it at the site. For example, a school would make a collection schedule and collect specimens from students. The school would then submit the specimens to the regional hub's laboratory where the specimens are tested. If the facility cannot provide staffing, the regional coordination hub may coordinate staff at a cost to the facility.

#### **Regional Coordination Hubs**

Hub 1 – West – <https://letsendthistogether.com> 

Hub 2 – Midwest – [www.testedandprotected.org](http://www.testedandprotected.org) 

Hubs 3 & 4 – Northeast & South – <https://operationexpandedtesting.com> 

CDC has awarded nearly \$30 billion through the [Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity](#) (ELC) cooperative agreement in support of COVID-19 testing and prevention efforts in communities, as well as among high-risk settings, such as correctional facilities and for people experiencing homelessness. In addition, CDC awarded \$10 billion through the (ELC) [Reopening Schools Award](#), which supports COVID-19 screening testing and other prevention activities to reopen and keep schools open safely for in-person instruction. If your jurisdiction received funding under one of these mechanisms, the funds may be used for the costs associated with setting up a site and specimen collection operations necessary for participation in the OpET testing program.

### Can private schools participate in the program?

Yes, private schools may enroll in the program.

### How is the testing funded?

In May 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in collaboration with the Department of Defense (DoD) created the \$650 million program, OpET, to expand national COVID-19 testing capacity for children and communities in need of testing.

### How are samples submitted for testing?

Facility staff collect the specimens and are given shipping and handling instructions by the regional coordination hub. Shipping is covered both ways by the regional coordination hub.

### What is the turnaround time for results?

Most results are reported to the facility within 24-48 hours. Some may take up to 72 hours after the specimen is collected.

### What is pooled testing?

**Pooling samples** is a testing method where a predetermined number of specimens are combined and used in one test. Pooled sample testing increases testing capacity and allows for higher volume screening. If a pool is negative, results are reported as negative for all individuals in that pool. If a pool is positive, the individual specimens from the positive pool are automatically routed for individual testing to determine which samples are positive. Both the positive and negative individual results are then reported. The regional coordination hub will work with your site to develop a testing plan that covers detailed information about pooled testing, as needed. See [Interim Guidance for Use of Pooling Procedures in SARS-CoV-2 Diagnostic and Screening Testing](#) for more information.

### How do I get started?

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2. **Visit** your regional coordination hub's website.
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  - Hub 2 – Midwest – [www.testedandprotected.org](http://www.testedandprotected.org)
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3. **Enroll** your school, child care center, shelter, or other congregate setting.

### How long is this resource available to the public?

The program is active through July 1, 2022.

## OpET Success Stories

### Hawaii

#### Students Resume Annual Camping Field Trip with Help from Operation Expanded Testing

A weekend camping trip to Camp Erdman in Waialua, Hawaii, is the highlight of the school year for many students at Aikahi Elementary School – but the COVID-19 pandemic halted this opportunity for the last two years. Principal Keoki

Fraser was determined to get students, staff, and families back to this treasured tradition in a responsible way. One solution was to implement COVID-19 testing to ensure safety.

Aikahi Elementary School is partnered with Operation Expanded Testing (OpET), a federally funded program that provides no-cost, laboratory-based testing to K-12 schools, child care centers, and other congregate settings. Implementing the OpET program presented a few challenges, among them getting buy-in from the parents and caregivers for screening testing, teaching students to properly collect nasals swabs, and coordinating with shipping couriers. These challenges stretched the school's limited faculty and staff resources. Principal Fraser turned to his school's parent volunteers to seek help. Parents and guardians guided students to specific testing locations on the school campus and assisted with labeling and collecting specimens.

Engaging parents and guardians proved to be successful. As a result, in December 2021, 100 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders participated in the screening testing program, preventing potential spread of COVID-19 and allowing peace of mind.

"This was a breakthrough for the program and the school to show that normal activities could still be done in the midst of a global pandemic," said Chasen Fukuda, Operations Manager for Reopening Schools, and [ELC](#) for the Hawaii Department of Health.

The pandemic has limited extracurricular opportunities for children, but by partnering with OpET, students were able to enjoy a sense of normalcy in ways that were not possible just one year ago.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes its partner, Perkin Elmer, for its support and management of OpET's Western Hub.

## Illinois

### **Flexible Partnership Between Illinois Department of Public Health, Operation Expanded Testing, and SHIELD Expands COVID-19 Testing for the State**

COVID-19 testing in schools and congregate settings proved to be a challenge in Illinois, partly because the rural and urban areas of the state greatly differed in their testing needs. To address the challenge of scale and varying needs, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) partnered with Operation Expanded Testing (OpET) to provide a routine testing option within Illinois, increase testing capacity, and facilitate faster access to COVID-19 testing.

As sites began implementing OpET, IDPH learned that routine testing programs are not a one-size-fits-all model. Early setbacks included limited staffing and specimen collection logistics. However, with the flexibility of the OpET program, IDPH was able to subcontract with SHIELD Illinois, a testing initiative pioneered by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, to provide trained staff to implement and manage OpET in school settings.

OpET has been particularly beneficial to small rural schools with a small number of tests by providing an expansive logistic network of shipping couriers and laboratories for easier specimen collection and shipment.

The partnership between SHIELD, IDPH, and OpET has proven successful in being used predominantly in areas with a high [Social Vulnerability Index](#) score, which is the main focus of the OpET program. "This is a strength of OpET. It has helped us focus on the smallest schools and the most rural schools," explained John Arenas, COVID-19 Testing Strategy Coordinator at IDPH. "We really needed FedEx or something similar to help us out because it was not efficient to reach those areas before."

In addition, the collaboration between OpET and IDPH has allowed routine testing to be implemented in congregate settings such as correctional facilities. IDPH directly connects the facilities with the OpET program, eliminating skepticism from administrators who receive cold calls from various testing companies. IDPH credits the increase in testing in these settings with OpET's willingness and flexibility to work directly with the state's health department. "It's thanks to OpET's willingness to work directly with IDPH and be flexible with the needs of these congregate settings that are even giving us a chance to sign them," Arenas said.

CDC recognizes the Midwest Coordination Center for its support and management of the OpET Midwestern Hub.

## Students at School of Northern Lights Become Confident in COVID-19 Testing Protocols, Allowing In-Person Learning All Year

The School of Northern Lights in St. Paul, Minnesota, has remained continuously open for in-person learning since the start of the 2021-22 school year with the help of COVID-19 testing. The small charter school's leader, Rachel Ngendakuriyo, also serves as the COVID-19 program coordinator and enrolled the School of Northern Lights in Operation Expanded Testing (OpET).

The program's scale and flexibility made the decision to enroll the School of Northern Lights in OpET a simple one. Routine testing for COVID-19 has maximized the number of in-person learning days and allowed students to participate in fun extracurricular activities. A return to an in-person educational setting has also alleviated the stress of distance-learning on teachers.

At first, some students and families were hesitant to consent for school testing – students were afraid of long nasal swabs and parents were concerned about quarantining entire classes in the event of a positive test result. However, OpET uses short, easy-to-use nasal swabs and, with time, students learned how to self-swab and became confident in the routine. Some students even showed others how easy the specimen collection was to do. In addition, OpET performs individual tests so that only those students who tested positive for COVID-19 would be asked to stay at home and away from others (isolate) – limiting the disruption for the whole classroom.

Enrolling the school into the OpET program also freed up limited community testing resources for community members. "It is such a huge lift off the shoulders of our families because a lot of them were still trying to get weekly PCR tests in the community," Ngendakuriyo said. "Parents are grateful that they do not have to find tests in the community and that they know what is going on in the classroom."

CDC acknowledges the Midwest Coordination Center for its support and management of the OpET Midwestern Hub.