



What to Know About COVID-19 Testing in Schools

Updated Aug. 22, 2022

CDC is reviewing this page to align with updated guidance.

Key Points

- Many schools are offering free, regular COVID-19 testing for students and staff. Regular testing means that testing is offered to everyone on a routine basis, even if they don't have symptoms of COVID-19.
- Regular school-based testing, along with COVID-19 vaccination, proper masking, and physical distancing, helps protect students, staff, and family members. It also protects those who are not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines or are otherwise at risk for getting seriously sick from COVID-19.
- COVID-19 tests offered at school are free, quick, easy, and painless.
- Opting into school COVID-19 testing programs can help keep students in the classroom and doing the school activities they enjoy, safely.

Some schools 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. Schools do not need to require a negative test result for students, teachers, and staff to return to school after breaks. Students, teachers, and staff who travel during breaks should follow CDC testing recommendations for [domestic](#) and [international](#) travel.

Regular COVID-19 Testing Can Help to Protect Everyone

Regular school-based testing, in addition to COVID-19 [vaccination](#), physical distancing, and proper mask wearing, 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. Regular testing helps find people who have the virus before it can spread to others or cause an outbreak. This is especially important for families and staff with younger children at home, those at risk for getting [seriously sick](#) from COVID-19, and those who are not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines. 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 helps keep students in the classroom and allows them to take part in the other activities they enjoy.

COVID-19 Tests are Free, Quick, and Easy

Tests offered at schools are free, quick, and easy and will help to tell if students or staff have COVID-19, 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.

Schools are expected to follow applicable legal requirements related to consent for testing. Staff will not be tested without consent. Students will not be tested without the consent of both the student and their guardian.

Confidentiality of Test Results

Schools are expected to keep test results of students, parents, guardians, teachers, or staff members confidential consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. But, also consistent with those laws, regulations, and policies, they may need to share that information with appropriate individuals (like the state health department).

Schools are Prepared if a Student or Staff Member Tests Positive

If someone at school tests positive for COVID-19, they will be asked to stay home for at least 5 full days (day 0 is the first day of symptoms or the day of the positive viral test for asymptomatic persons). Anyone who tests positive will also be asked about people they have been around so that everyone who has been exposed can be notified, consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and policies related to contact tracing. People who have been exposed may also need to stay home, depending on their [vaccination and booster status](#) or history of prior infection in the past 90 days, and follow the school's policies. When someone tests positive, having them stay home for at least 5 days (even if they have no symptoms of COVID-19) reduces the risk of the virus spreading to others at school, preventing an outbreak and keeping schools open. For more details about staying at home when sick with COVID-19, see the [Overview of COVID-19 Isolation for K-12 Schools](#).

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

Test to Stay Can Help Keep Students Learning In-Person

Test to Stay (TTS) combines [contact tracing](#) and [testing](#) (testing that is repeated at least twice during a seven-day period after last close contact with a person with COVID-19) to allow some students, teachers, and staff who would otherwise need to [quarantine](#), do not test positive for COVID-19, and do not have symptoms of COVID-19 to continue in-person learning. This includes people who are a school-associated close contact, are not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines, do not test positive for SARS-CoV-2, and have no symptoms. TTS participants should get tested at least upon notification of their close contact and again on 5-7 days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19.

Students who participate in TTS should properly wear well-fitting masks while in school and should stay home and [isolate](#) if they develop symptoms or test positive for SARS-CoV-2. Schools considering TTS should 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 after a close contact 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 TTS as an option for keeping asymptomatic school-associated close contacts in the classroom as an alternative to traditional quarantine at home. Because TTS 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.

Related Pages

- › [Guidance for K-12 Schools and Childcare Programs](#)
- › [FAQs for K-12 and ECE Settings: Testing](#)
- › [Testing Strategies for SARS-CoV-2](#)
- › [Types of Masks](#)
- › [Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs](#)
- › [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](#) ↗

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