



Conducting Contact Tracing in K-12 Schools

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When a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 is identified in a student, teacher, or staff member in a school setting, the case investigator should gather information to help determine close contacts and exclusion recommendations. Additionally, the investigator will need to work with the school to conduct a thorough investigation and ensure the appropriate follow-up occurs. The following definitions are important to understand when conducting case investigation and contact tracing.

Definitions

Confirmed Case – a polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-positive case with or without symptoms

Probable Case – an antigen-positive case or a symptomatic contact of a case

Infectious Period – a case of COVID-19 is considered infectious from two days prior to symptom onset, or specimen collection date for asymptomatic cases, through 10 days later

Close Contact – anyone who was within 6 feet of a confirmed or probable case for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period while they were considered infectious, regardless of whether either person wore a cloth face covering or face shield. Additionally, if they shared eating or drinking utensils or had direct physical contact with the person such as hugging or kissing.

Isolation – Applies to those who are symptomatic or test positive for COVID-19 and involves staying home from work, school, and/or activities. Isolation lasts for at least 10 days after the onset of symptoms, and at least 24 hours fever-free without fever-reducing medication, and an improvement of other symptoms. For cases who have not had symptoms, isolation lasts 10 days from the day of specimen collection for their first positive test. In rare instances (e.g., if a person was very sick or has certain serious underlying medical conditions), isolation may last 20 days. Repeat testing is not recommended to decide when to end the period of isolation. Instead, determining when to end isolation should be based on the symptom-based criteria above.

Quarantine – Applies to those who are potentially exposed and involves staying home from work, school, or other activities when a person is a close contact to someone with COVID-19. The recommended quarantine period is 14 days. The quarantine may be shortened to 10 days, without laboratory testing, if daily symptom monitoring indicates the contact remains symptom free. Quarantine may be shortened to as few as 7 days if negative PCR testing is obtained on day 6 or later. Quarantined individuals released back to school before 14 days, should continue to monitor for symptoms, socially distance, practice good hand hygiene, and use a mask through Day 14. If symptoms develop within 14 days of last exposure, the contact should self-isolate, seek medical care, and get tested. Contacts testing positive within 14 days would be considered cases and the isolation criteria would apply

Case Investigation – Investigations should be completed on all confirmed and probable cases. Investigators are to collect information regarding the cases' symptoms and any sensitive

occupations (e.g., health care workers) and elicit contacts including household, school, work and other activities.

Contact Tracing – Contacts are elicited during the investigation of confirmed and probable cases. Contacts are then informed of their possible exposure to a case and the need to quarantine. They are given information on the virus and the disease and asked to monitor for symptoms.

Case Interview

The interview with confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases in K–12 school settings should address the following information requirements and should be input into Merlin within 24 hours:

- Date of symptom onset
- For asymptomatic cases, date of specimen collection for first positive test
- Reason the case was tested (e.g., symptoms, contact to case, part of outbreak or cluster)
- Date(s) the person last worked/attended school during their infectious period
- Mode of transportation to and from the school (e.g., bus, carpool, etc.)
- Before and after school activities (e.g., clubs, sports, etc.)

School Evaluation

The evaluation of the school for confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases in the K–12 school setting should address the following information requirements:

- When was the person on campus during their infectious period?
- With whom did that person come in close contact?
- Was that person with a single cohort in one classroom throughout the school day?
- Was that person mixing with other people or classrooms?
- Was there intermixing between groups or classrooms?
- How were the classrooms set up (desk separation and spacing)?

The information gathered during the case interview and school evaluation will dictate the recommendations that need to be followed. Close contacts to the case should be notified by phone and possibly by letter regarding their potential exposure and advised of required follow-up actions. They should stay home and quarantine for the recommended quarantine period, up to 14 days from their last exposure to the case. Of note, current CDC guidance indicates that, if someone was diagnosed with COVID-19 within the previous 3 months of the exposure, they do not need to quarantine.

Depending upon the case's movements and actions, the number of people considered close contacts will vary. For example, if the case was deemed to have spent limited time at the school while infectious, or strict cohorting and social distancing within the classroom is observed, very few students or teachers would need to be quarantined. If strict cohorting is done, but there is prolonged contact and some close interaction in the classroom, then the teacher and all students in the classroom will likely be quarantined, and the classroom cleaned and disinfected. If the case was interacting with students and teachers throughout the school campus while infectious, then a larger number of students and school personnel may need to be quarantined.

More broad interventions may also be needed if investigations reveal untraceable transmission in the school setting.

Testing Recommendations

Asymptomatic staff and students who are close contacts to COVID-19 cases may choose to be tested by PCR on Day 6 or later. If negative, they may leave quarantine after Day 7. Without testing, quarantine can end after Day 10, if daily symptom monitoring indicates they are symptom free. Individuals should continue to monitor for symptoms and practice good hand hygiene, social distancing and wear a mask through Day 14.

If close contacts to someone with COVID-19 develop symptoms within the 14 days, they should seek medical care and testing. Once the contact's symptoms resolve, if they test PCR-negative for COVID-19 on Day 6 or later, the contact may return to school and activities after the 7-day quarantine period ends. If the contact tests positive for COVID-19 or doesn't seek testing, then the individual is now considered a case and should follow the release from isolation guidance for cases of COVID-19.

When selecting a testing laboratory, make sure results can be provided within 24 to 48 hours. As stated above, repeat testing is not recommended to decide when to end the period of isolation for COVID-19 cases. Repeat testing is not recommended within the first 3 months of the date of the original positive laboratory result, as this is unlikely to provide additional information useful for decision making.

Options for COVID-19 testing for staff/students who have been excluded from school:

- Staff/students obtain testing through their private medical provider
- Staff/students obtain testing at a [public testing site](#) in their community
- County health departments facilitate testing, particularly when school outbreaks occur or if testing is needed to support decision making county health departments should consider consulting with the Bureau of Public Laboratories regarding testing at one of the state public health laboratories.

Cleaning and Disinfection

When a COVID-19 case has been in the school while infectious, the CDC recommends cleaning and disinfecting the building thoroughly by:

- Closing off areas used by the persons with COVID-19 and waiting as long as practical (if possible, up to 24 hours) before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets
 - If possible, open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area
- Cleaning and disinfecting all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the person(s) with COVID-19, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles)
 - Surfaces should be cleaned using soap (or a detergent) and water prior to disinfection
 - For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective against the virus that causes COVID-19

References and Resources

[CDC School Recommendations](#)

[CDC Cleaning, Disinfection and Hand Hygiene in Schools](#)

[COVID-19 Case Definition](#)

[Contact Tracing Guidance](#)

[Outbreak Guidance](#)

[CDC Options to Reduce Quarantine](#)