Alameda County, Public Health Department
K-12 School FAQs

The FAQs below are aligned with CDPH K-12 guidance, including new guidance for group contact tracing, and general isolation and quarantine guidance. See also ACPHD’s testing guidance for information on confirmatory diagnostic testing and clearance testing.

WHAT TO DO AFTER AN EXPOSURE

1. Can ALL exposed students stay in school, even if they are unvaccinated?
Yes! All exposed, asymptomatic students can stay in school after an exposure even if the exposure took place outside of school. All exposed students are strongly recommended to mask for 10 days and test 3 to 5 days after the exposure with any FDA-authorized test. CDPH guidance no longer recommends testing exposed, asymptomatic students with a previous COVID-19 infection within the last 90 days.

2. What are the options for identifying exposed students?
Until recently, schools relied on the traditional individual-level model for contact tracing. If a case was identified, staff would try to determine which students were close contacts of the case and notify them. CDPH has released a second option for identifying exposed students that may be less time consuming for schools to implement. In the group-tracing model, schools can consider students to be exposed if they shared indoor airspace with a case for a total of 15 minutes in a day. So, a single case in a classroom would mean that the entire class is considered exposed. See the linked guidance above for more information about the exposure notification process.

3. What if a school can’t meet the testing recommendations?
Schools should make every effort to test exposed students at least once by Day 5 after exposure. However, schools can prioritize students for testing in the following order:
- Students with symptoms of COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.
- Exposed, asymptomatic students who have not completed a primary vaccine series. If schools cannot test this group, they can choose to restrict return to school until after quarantine is completed at home.
- Exposed, asymptomatic students who are fully vaccinated.
CDPH guidance no longer recommends testing exposed, asymptomatic students with a previous COVID-19 infection within the last 90 days.

4. What if a school is not able to track the testing cadence after every exposure?
Schools can provide weekly testing to ALL students, rather than ensure testing is provided 3-5 days after exposure. If testing resources are limited, schools can also prioritize testing only students with symptoms regardless of vaccination status or students who have not completed a primary vaccine series.
5. Can we still choose to keep exposed, UNVACCINATED students at home?
This is not recommended. However, students are strongly recommended to mask for 10 days and test 3 to 5 days after the exposure with any FDA-authorized test.

6. For school and districts with continued mask mandates, can a student with a mask exemption stay in school after an exposure?
Schools can make this determination based on factors specific to affected classrooms, such as ventilation status and other mitigation measures that are in place to decrease risk of transmission. The determination may also be affected by the student population in the classroom (e.g. Special Day Class, general ed).

**EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

7. Can ALL exposed students participate in extracurricular activities?
Exposed students may continue to take part in all aspects of K-12 schooling, including after school programs, sports and other extracurricular activities, unless they develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

**CONTACT TRACING**

8. Do we still need to upload close contacts into SPOT?
Close contacts no longer need to report into SPOT.

**TESTING TO RELEASE FROM ISOLATION**

9. Can a home antigen test be used to release from isolation?
Yes, a home antigen test may be used to release from isolation. Please see this [CDPH Over-The-Counter-Test](https://www.acphd.org/) (aka home test) guidance for more information.

10. Can people who have a positive antigen test on Day 10 of isolation return to school?
Yes. For those who want to release from isolation before Day 10, it is recommended that an antigen test be taken on Day 5 or after. If the test is positive, the person should complete a 10-day isolation without further testing. If a subsequent test is positive, the person can still return to school/work on Day 11 as recommended prior to the shortened isolation option.

**INFECTED WITHIN LAST 90 DAYS**

11. What should I advise a student/staff to do who has had COVID in the past 90 days and develops symptoms?
Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested. A positive antigen test would indicate a new COVID-19 infection. A positive PCR test may indicate a new infection or leftover virus from the previous infection. If someone had a documented COVID-19 infection within 90 days and tests positive by PCR, they should contact their healthcare provider for next steps.

**TESTING**

12. Why do test results sometimes disagree?
There are several reasons why someone can be tested more than once and get different results. For example, when a person has been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the amount of virus in their nose and throat can go up and down over time. Because of this, a test collected on two different days during COVID-19 infection may show different results. If specimens are collected using different techniques or if different labs are used, this can also cause inconsistent test results, even when infection is present. **When there is a mix of positive and negative antigen and PCR results, the positive test result will be used to guide isolation and quarantine decisions.**

13. What if a person was sick weeks or months ago and never got tested?
COVID-19 symptoms, especially when mild, are similar to the symptoms of many other common illnesses including colds, the flu and even seasonal allergies. It can be difficult to determine whether past symptoms were due to COVID-19. For this reason, when there is a new positive test, only current symptoms are considered when making decisions about isolation and quarantine.

14. What if a healthcare provider says that someone with a positive test result doesn’t have COVID-19?
Individual health care providers may occasionally interpret COVID-19 test results for a single individual differently from the standards established by local, state and national public health authorities. However, COVID-19 public health decisions based on these standards reflect the need to protect many people in our communities from the spread of the virus and are based on the best available evidence collected throughout the pandemic. Decisions about isolation and quarantine are guided by the test results.

15. Does “Day 5 or after” refer to the day the test was taken OR the day the result was received?
It refers to the day the sample was collected/test was taken.

**MASKING**

16. Can we have more strict masking requirements than the state?
Yes. Schools and districts can set policies more restrictive than the state but not less restrictive.
17. Are mesh masks effective?
Mesh masks are decorative only and do NOT meet CDPH guidance on what constitutes an effective mask. See CDPH “Get the Most out of Masking” resource.

LUNCH AND RECESS

18. How can we minimize close contact when eating lunch indoors?
Employ physical distance to the degree feasible for your space. Look for opportunities to spread indoor lunch across multiple settings, so students don't all occupy one space. Maximize the opportunities for outdoor lunch.

COVID SYMPTOMS/CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITIONS

19. What language should a medical evaluation (defined as Physician, Nurse Practitioner, or Certified Physician Assistant) include in at note documenting a student’s chronic medical condition?
The note should describe the symptoms typical of the student's underlying chronic condition (e.g., allergies or asthma) and provide a time boundary for the symptoms when applicable.

Travel

20. How does Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) define domestic travel?
Persons who travel should follow the CDC travel guidance. Alameda County has defined domestic travel as travel outside the nine Bay Area counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano and Sonoma).