



## Keeping Kids in School: Exposure, Test-to-Stay, and General Testing 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 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.

### **What do exposed, VACCINATED students need to do?**

Vaccinated students do not need to quarantine and can participate in all school activities, even if they are booster-eligible but unboosted. Exposed vaccinated students should test 3 to 5 days<sup>1</sup> after the exposure with any FDA-authorized test.

### **What do exposed students who were PREVIOUSLY INFECTED (within the last 90 days) need to do?**

Students with a documented infection within 90 days do not need to quarantine but should test 3 to 5 days<sup>1</sup> after exposure with an **antigen** test. Documented infections include positive home antigen tests.

### **What are the options for keeping exposed, UNVACCINATED students in school?**

Unvaccinated students can stay in school even if the exposure did not occur when both students were masked. The exposure must have occurred when the students were at school, either during the instructional day or during a school-related extracurricular activity (e.g. afterschool program, sports). Students should test 3 to 5 days<sup>1</sup> after the exposure with any FDA-authorized test.

### **Can exposed, UNVACCINATED students participate in extracurricular activities at SCHOOL?**

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.

### **Can exposed, UNVACCINATED students participate in extracurricular activities in the COMMUNITY?**

No. Unvaccinated, exposed students are permitted to leave quarantine to attend school and participate in school-related activities. However, they must quarantine at home at all other times for at least 5 days.

### **Does the close contact need to be between masked students for UNVACCINATED, exposed students to stay in school?**

No, but schools can choose to make this a requirement.



### **What happens if an UNVACCINATED student is exposed outside of school/school-based activity?**

The student would need to quarantine for a minimum of 5 days at home. It is recommended that persons have a negative test on or after Day 5 if quarantining for fewer than 10 days.

### **Can we still choose to keep exposed, UNVACCINATED students at home?**

A school can choose to have students stay at home until the end of quarantine. CDPH guidance allows exposed persons to exit quarantine any time after Day 5 with a negative test.

### **How does the new group contact tracing option differ from “modified quarantine (MQ)”?**

The group option is really just a new iteration of MQ. In standard MQ, the exposure needed to be mask-on-mask, and unvaccinated students could only participate in the instructional day, not extra-curricular activities. *In addition, the minimum quarantine until recently was 7 days, so schools had been asked to test students twice during that time.* The new [group contact tracing guidance](#) is slightly looser than the previous guidance. Students do not need to be masked during the exposure and can continue to participate in extra-curricular activities. *In addition, the shortest quarantine period is now 5 days, so schools are only asked to test students once during this time between days 3 and 5.* Schools are free to continue following the more conservative guidance.

### **What if a school can't meet the testing recommendations?**

Our local Health Officer Order recommends but does not require testing to release from quarantine on Day 6. For students to stay in school rather than quarantine at home, *schools should make every effort to test exposed students at least once by Day 5 after exposure.* CDPH suggests weekly testing for ALL students while numbers of exposures are high. However, **schools can prioritize students for testing in the following order:**

- 1) Students with symptoms of COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Exposed, asymptomatic students who are fully vaccinated.
- 4) Exposed, asymptomatic students with a documented COVID-19 infection within the last 90 days.

### **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<sup>1</sup> 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.

### **Can a school send out a campus-wide exposure notification, or should the exposure notification be sent only to those students identified as exposed?**

While cases remain high, schools can choose to send a school-wide exposure notification and/or provide weekly updates of cases and exposures.



**Do we still need to upload close contacts into SPOT?**

Schools should prioritize uploading cases into SPOT.

**Can a student with a mask exemption participate in the ‘test-to-stay’ option?**

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).

**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.**

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.