

## Recommendations for Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in K-12 Schools

October 12, 2020

**PLEASE NOTE: Updates to this document will appear in orange text.**

### Background

This guidance is intended to assist schools in responding to outbreaks of COVID-19. This guidance supplements but does not replace recommendations included in New Hampshire's [Universal Guidelines](#), NH Department of Education's [New Hampshire Grades K-12 Back-to-School Guidance](#) or the [NH DHHS Educational Institutions Frequently Asked Questions](#).

All institutions should adhere to current CDC [Guidance for Schools and Childcare Programs](#), including [universal source control measures](#); social distancing; and screening of students and staff.

Please notify the NH Division of Public Health Services (603-271-4496 or 603-271-5300 after hours) if there is a **case of COVID-19** identified at your institution. All cases **that were diagnosed by PCR or antigen tests** should be reported to the Bureau of Infectious Disease Control and not directly to other state or local health departments.

### Immediate Actions

#### Isolation, Quarantine, and Identification of Close Contacts

- Follow the steps below for any person **presenting with new or unexplained symptoms of COVID-19** while at school:
  1. Mask the person ([unless they cannot do so safely](#)). Be sure mask is properly covering the nose and mouth.
  2. Place the person in a private room with the door closed if safe to do so (at a minimum they should be separated from others).
  3. Assure caregiver (e.g., school nurse) wears [recommended COVID-19 personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) when in the same room as the person suspected to have COVID-19.  
Recommended PPE includes:
    - a. A surgical face mask at all times.
    - b. Eye protection (goggles or face shield) if the nurse is within six feet of the person, OR if the symptomatic person is unable to wear a face mask (even if more than 6 feet away).
    - c. If prolonged close contact is anticipated (within 6 feet of the person for 10 total minutes or more), or if there is contact with the person's secretions/excretions, then wear all appropriate recommended PPE including: surgical face mask, eye protection, gown, and gloves.
  4. Record the person's temperature.
  5. Perform a brief assessment of the person's symptoms. Keep any assessment brief and stay at least 6 feet away to the extent possible.

6. Arrange for the person go home immediately by private transportation. Students with **new and unexplained symptoms of COVID-19** should **NOT** ride the bus home. If the ill person requires immediate medical care, call 911 and inform the 911 dispatcher and transport personnel that the person has **new and unexplained symptoms of COVID-19 or who were diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests.**
- Only allow students and staff **that were diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests** to return to school after they have met criteria for [removal from home isolation](#).
  - If a symptomatic individual tests negative for COVID-19 by an appropriate testing **technology (RT-PCR or antigen)**, exclude them from school according to usual protocols (e.g., for influenza, the individual can return when they have been fever free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours). If, however, the individual was on quarantine for an exposure to COVID-19, they must complete their 14-day quarantine.
  - Students and staff determined to have been in close contact to the person **who was diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests** should remain home for their period of quarantine.
    - Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet for a total of 10 cumulative minutes or more, beginning 48 hours prior to illness onset or date of specimen collection associated with the positive COVID-19 test, whichever is earlier.
    - The quarantine period is defined as 14 days from the **close** contact’s last potential exposure to the person with COVID-19. A negative COVID-19 test result during the 14 day quarantine period does NOT change the duration of quarantine nor allow the person to end quarantine early.

Management of Household Contacts (HHCs) of Persons with New and Unexplained Symptoms of COVID-19, Based on the Symptomatic Person’s COVID-19 Risk Factors and Testing Status:

Risk Factor?*	Viral Testing Pending? †	Action:
Present	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptomatic person isolates pending test result.</li> <li>• HHCs quarantine pending test results.</li> </ul>
	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptomatic person must remain on isolation until they have met CDC’s criteria for <a href="#">discontinuation of isolation</a>.</li> <li>• HHCs quarantine for 14 days from last day of exposure.</li> </ul>
Absent	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptomatic person isolates pending test result.</li> <li>• HHCs can remain in school/work as long as they remain asymptomatic, but if test is positive then quarantine.</li> </ul>
	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptomatic person must remain on isolation until they have met CDC’s criteria for <a href="#">discontinuation of isolation</a>.</li> <li>• HHCs can remain in school/work as long as they remain asymptomatic.</li> </ul>

\* Risk Factors for COVID-19 exposure include close contact to a person with COVID-19, travel outside of the New England area, or other high-risk activities as identified by an employer or public health in the 14 days before symptom onset.

† Appropriate COVID-19 viral testing includes molecular (i.e., RT-PCR) or antigen tests, but note antigen tests must be conducted within an appropriate time frame after symptom onset, as specified in manufacturer instructions. Antibody tests are not appropriate for diagnosing active infection.

- Review relevant classroom and cafeteria seating arrangements in consultation with NH DPHS to assist in identifying close contacts.
- Recommend that all quarantined students and staff undergo viral RNA (e.g., PCR) or viral antigen testing for COVID-19. (See [testing](#) section below).
- Do not permit those who are on quarantine or isolation to enter the school or campus.
- Provide distance teaching and learning options for students and staff with **new or unexplained symptoms** or **those diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests** for the duration of their [isolation](#).
- Provide distance teaching and learning options for students and staff who are close contacts to **those diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests** for the duration of their [quarantine](#).
- Close off any areas where the individual **diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests** was prior to leaving the school.
  - Wait up to 24 hours or as long as possible before cleaning.
  - Clean and disinfect surfaces (e.g., desks, doorknobs, keyboards, faucets etc.) known to have been touched by the individual. See [CDC's Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) webpage for further details.
- [Clean any transportation vehicles](#) (e.g., buses) on which the individual traveled before they are used again.
- In partnership with DPHS, identify possible potential close contacts outside of classes and other structured activities (e.g., social groups and break and meal periods).

## Additional Actions

### Hand Hygiene, Social Distancing and Environmental Decontamination

- Reinforce basic infection control practices by promoting frequent hand hygiene (e.g., through signage and supervision), making hand sanitizer available, and [environmental cleaning](#) of appropriate surfaces.
- Ensure classroom seating:
  1. Maximizes physical distance to maintain at least a 6 foot distance whenever possible.
  2. Students are NOT be spaced closer than 3 feet to each other when seated in a classroom.
  3. If it is necessary to space students within 3-6 feet of others in the classroom setting, schools should employ other mitigation strategies to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., cloth face covering use while seated and conducting classes).
- Maximize ventilation indoors by opening windows when possible.
- Perform frequent cleaning of common areas, classrooms, and other high-touch surfaces
  - Refer to [List N](#) for disinfectants that are effective against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).

### Transmission Based Precautions & Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Follow CDC's COVID-19 infection prevention and control [recommendations](#), which include information on recommended PPE for nurses or healthcare personnel in schools:
  - For management of persons with **new or unexplained symptoms of COVID-19** or **those diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests**, school nurses or healthcare

personnel should wear gown, gloves, eye protection (face shield or goggles), and a surgical facemask or N95 or higher-level respirator as outlined below:

- Use surgical masks for evaluation of persons with **new and unexplained symptoms of COVID-19**, including for specimen collection for COVID-19 testing.
- Use an N95 or higher level respirator for aerosol-generating procedures.
- Consider using an N95 or higher-level respirator for evaluation of symptomatic suspect patients who may be at higher risk of aerosolizing respiratory droplets (e.g., students with significant frequent coughing, sneezing, etc.)
- Cloth face coverings are not PPE and should not be worn for the care of patients with **new or unexplained symptoms of COVID-19 or those diagnosed with COVID-19 by PCR or antigen tests**.

### General Information

- Implement a flexible, non-punitive sick leave policy for staff and students.
- Notify staff, students, families, and transportation providers promptly (within 12 hours) in the event that COVID-19 is identified at the school.
- Identify a COVID-19 coordinator to monitor evolving guidance, coordinate facility level responses, troubleshoot problems, facilitate information-gathering in the event of a public health investigation, and serve as a liaison with public health.

## Testing

### Screening and Testing Students and Staff

- Continue routine screening procedures for staff, visitors, and students.
- Consider implementing a second symptom screening for students upon entry to the school or arrival at the first class of the day.
  - Immediately send home any person with new or unexplained symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (even if symptoms are mild) and instruct to self-isolate at home.
  - Recommend symptomatic person contact their healthcare provider to be tested for COVID-19. If necessary, refer them to a facility that can provide testing. **Statewide testing locations can be found [here](#)**.
- Recommend that all close contacts who are quarantined, regardless of symptoms, undergo viral RNA (e.g., PCR) or viral antigen testing for COVID-19.
  - Viral antigen testing should be used only for persons with symptoms compatible with COVID-19, and testing should occur within 5 days of symptom onset.
  - Persons with a positive viral RNA or positive antigen test should isolate from others until meeting criteria for discontinuation of isolation.
  - A negative test does not allow someone to end their quarantine early.

## Working in Partnership with You

The NH Division of Public Health Services, COVID-19 Congregate Setting Investigation Unit will assist you with the next steps:

- Notify staff, students and families that a COVID-19 exposure occurred at your school, including tailored messaging if necessary.

- DPHS staff will reach out to any person (or the parent/guardian of any person) who is diagnosed with COVID-19. These individuals will be instructed to isolate and asked to share their close contacts for the purpose of contact tracing.
- DPHS staff will reach out to any person (or the parent/guardian of any person) who is identified as a close contact to a case of COVID-19. Close contacts will be instructed to quarantine for 14 days from the last date of exposure to the case, to be tested for COVID-19, and to call their pediatrician/primary care provider if health concerns arise while on quarantine.

The COVID-19 Congregate Setting Investigation Unit will ask you for the following:

- A current list of all students and staff (called a line list) who are ill or have tested positive for COVID-19. The COVID-19 Congregate Settings Investigation Unit will provide the appropriate format, separating students and staff on the list.
- Your assistance in identifying additional close contacts for whom the case is not familiar (peers in classes, meetings, etc.). This means all persons who were within 6 feet for a total of 10 cumulative minutes or more, beginning 48 hours prior to first illness onset or collection of positive test, whichever is earlier. The COVID-19 Congregate Settings Investigation Unit will provide a format to collect this information, if needed.
- The total number of staff and students at your school, as well as the total number of staff and students in the specific classroom, dorm or other physical locations where the ill person(s) were.
- If indicated, provide lists/diagrams of classrooms, cafeteria, school-sponsored transportation providers, and other room seating assignments to assist in identifying those who may have been exposed.
- Regular updates of all newly ill or positive students and staff, and of any newly identified contacts. An update should be sent every day that there is a newly ill or positive individual **or** newly identified contact.

Please note:

- Any email communications that may contain protected health information or personally identifiable information should be completed through the use of encryption to protect privacy and confidentiality. In order to ensure encryption, NH DHHS will provide you with instructions via email.
- The incubation period for COVID-19 can be up to 14 days and the identification of new case within a week to 10 days of starting the interventions does not necessarily represent a failure of the interventions to control transmission.
- The COVID-19 Congregate Settings Investigation Unit will determine when an outbreak or cluster investigation can be closed. Typical timeframes to close the investigation is after 14 days have passed without new cases and 14 days have passed since the last date of exposure at the institution, whichever is longer.