
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING COVID-19 IN THE 2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR

August 2022

**2022-23
SCHOOL YEAR**

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Introduction

Our communities continue to feel the impact of COVID-19 and will likely experience new COVID-19 infections throughout the 2022-2023 school year. Therefore, Delaware districts, charter, private and parochial schools, referred to as schools and districts throughout this document, will continue to play an important role in preventing and reducing the spread of COVID-19 throughout the state. Depending on community levels of COVID-19, schools and districts can implement prevention strategies that best protect their students, staff, and communities. This document outlines current best practices and options for Delaware schools and districts to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and assist with planning for the upcoming school year. Additionally, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to provide up-to-date [best practices for COVID-19 prevention in schools](#).

Tracking Community Levels of COVID-19

Since mid-2020, the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) has maintained the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Data Dashboard](#). Along with key information about the COVID-19 response in Delaware, the Dashboard provides a ZIP code level view of new infections. Schools and districts can use this website to track the levels of COVID-19 infection in their surrounding communities to help guide response in their schools.

Community levels of COVID-19 are monitored and reported by the CDC at the county level. The CDC Community Levels (low, medium, or high) are assigned based on the number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and occupied hospital beds. Prevention strategies based on the community level can be found on the CDC Community Levels site [here](#).

Wastewater surveillance is an additional strategy that monitors specific disease indicators in community wastewater, or sewage. In Delaware, DPH, the Delaware Public Health Laboratory (DPHL), the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), and other state agencies have been meeting to discuss wastewater surveillance as a possible method of monitoring COVID-19 incidence in communities across the state. Wastewater from a sewer shed—a community area served by a wastewater collection system—flows into a treatment plant, then samples are collected and sent to DPHL for SARS-CoV-2 testing. Wastewater surveillance may act as an early indicator of an increase or decrease of COVID-19 levels in a community. Data from the Delaware Data Dashboard, CDC Community Levels site, and wastewater surveillance can assist schools and districts in implementing response strategies as needed to help prevent outbreaks of COVID-19. As plans for how to use the results of wastewater testing continue to develop, DPH and the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) will provide updates to schools and districts.

DPH has also formed an internal Vaccine and Testing Task Force to regularly assess case rates, hospitalizations, deaths due to COVID-19, and other data to monitor community COVID-19 levels across Delaware and ensure that necessary resources and supplies are available in each community. The DPH and DDOE will also partner to ensure that schools and districts are informed of recommendations and resources available through the Vaccine and Testing Task Force.

Critically, as Delaware's experience since the 2020-2021 school year has demonstrated, school nurses and other supporting staff are often the most important early indicator of outbreaks within a school. Schools and districts should continue efforts to monitor confirmed COVID-19 cases among the student

and staff population. Further, DDOE and DPH staff will continue to organize and participate in school nurse calls during the 2022-2023 school year. These calls have been an effective venue for schools, districts, and state agencies to share best practices and other information important for COVID-19 response.

Vaccines

Vaccination continues to be the most important strategy for protecting against severe COVID-19 illness and limiting the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Currently, everyone six months and older is eligible for free COVID-19 vaccines. Children can experience severe symptoms from COVID-19. Staying up to date on vaccinations (including boosters, when eligible) is the most effective way of preventing serious illness and hospitalization in both children and adults and can also help limit the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

Schools and Districts should consider continuing vaccination promotion efforts that proved successful this past school year, including updating parents and guardians on current CDC recommendations on vaccination for children and providing information on the availability of vaccines. Since the 2020-2021 school year, many schools within Delaware and nationally, often partnering with local health care providers, held vaccine clinics for students and staff. This has proven to be an important strategy for ensuring equitable access to vaccines for students and staff with limited access to health care providers or transportation.

To stay informed of current CDC vaccination recommendations, visit the [COVID-19 vaccination](#) information page on their website. Additionally, Delaware's COVID-19 website provides a page dedicated to vaccine information for youth and where they are available at de.gov/youthvaccine, as well as information on where vaccines are [available throughout the state](#).

Testing Options

During the 2021-2022 school year, testing was a key strategy for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Given the community levels of COVID-19, DPH and DDOE partnered with Quidel to provide in-school screening testing and test-to-stay (TTS) programs for all schools and districts choosing to participate. DPH will not be using Quidel, or coordinating statewide testing in schools, during 2022-2023 school year. Depending on community levels of COVID-19 during the upcoming school year, schools and districts could consider implementing their own testing programs. Schools and districts considering testing programs must receive a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certificate of waiver in advance of implementing their program. Please note that CLIA certificates of waiver must be renewed after two years—some schools and districts that received certificates of waiver early in the pandemic will need to renew for the upcoming school year.

While a statewide in-school testing program is not anticipated for the 2022-2023 school year, supplies will be available through DPH and CDC. Updates describing the process for ordering new testing supplies from DPH will be shared with school and district contacts as soon as possible. While many schools and districts have reported that they have adequate stores of testing supplies to start the school year, schools and districts are encouraged to plan several months ahead for replenishing existing supplies, and ensure current supply is not expired. Please note, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has updated expiration dates for various tests and current date information can be found on their [website](#).

As in previous school years, several models of testing can be useful for preventing COVID-19 spread in schools. The following options are recommended by the CDC and were effective in Delaware schools during the 2021-2022 school year.

Screening Test Program

Routine asymptomatic screening testing is no longer recommended. However, during times in which COVID-19 community levels are high, schools can consider implementing screening testing for students and staff for higher-risk activities (for example, close contact sports, band, choir, theater); before/after large events (prom, tournaments, group travel); and when returning from breaks (such as, holidays, spring break, at the beginning of the school year). In any screening testing program, testing should include both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. With this method, a positive screening antigen test suggests an active COVID-19 infection and the potential for false-positive results is minimal.

To implement a screening testing program, schools and districts can utilize at-home test kits, in-school rapid antigen testing, and community testing resources. For schools and districts considering screening testing, [Appendix B](#) includes template communications for introducing the program to parents and guardians. [Appendix C](#) includes a sample process for conducting screening testing. This process may be modified to fit the needs of the school and district.

As an alternative to in-school testing, schools and districts can consider distributing at-home testing kits to parents or guardians at their students' pick-up and drop-off locations; sending kits home with students; or making them available at community sites such as libraries. In 2021-2022, schools found this strategy to be particularly helpful for ensuring that students were testing negative before returning to school following a break.

Diagnostic Testing

Schools can promote and offer diagnostic testing for students and staff who display symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or following a known or suspected exposure to COVID-19. At any COVID-19 community level, diagnostic testing can be helpful for early detection of COVID-19 outbreaks and prevent spread in schools. To implement diagnostic testing, schools and districts can offer in-school rapid antigen testing for students and staff that develop symptoms during the school day. Alternatively, schools and districts can consider offering at-home test kits to send home with a student or staff member if they develop symptoms or have been a close contact to someone testing positive. A diagnostic testing program needs to be paired with procedures for isolating students that test positive and need to be picked up from school. See [Appendix C](#) for additional testing information.

One Delaware school district piloted and implemented observed testing after the statewide TTS program had ended in response to an increase in cases in their community. The program focused on symptomatic testing and allowed students to sign up to conduct an at-home test with virtual supervision. The district reported that this option was an effective and popular option for parents and guardians due to the ease of signing up for testing, clear instructions, and the convenience of being able to test at home.

Management of Cases and Exposures

Schools and districts can find up-to-date guidance for students and staff on the [DDOE website](#) and in [Appendix A](#). Additionally, current CDC recommendations for quarantine and isolation can be found on their [website](#).

In general, quarantine is no longer recommended for people who are exposed to COVID-19. However, people who were exposed to someone with COVID-19 should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 full days. That is why they should also get tested at least 5 full days after the last exposure, or immediately if symptoms develop, and continue wearing a mask for 10 days even if the test is negative.

As of August 2022, students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 should report the positive test results to their school nurse or COVID coordinator and isolate for five days regardless of vaccination status. On day 6 after the positive test or symptoms started to appear, the student or staff member can exit isolation if they have had no fever for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and other COVID-19 symptoms are improving. They must also wear a well-fitting mask for an additional five full days after exiting isolation. CDC provides options for students to end masking early during the second half of the isolation period. Schools that wish to offer students this option, may choose a test-based strategy, which includes the student taking two antigen tests, 48 hours apart, with the first test being no earlier than day 6 of their isolation period. If both tests are negative, masking can end on day 8. If either test is positive, they should continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours before taking another test. They should continue taking antigen tests 48 hours apart until they have two sequential negative test results.

Schools and districts should consider communicating with parents and guardians by email, letter, and other methods to ensure that they have access to current guidelines. Schools and districts should also consider isolation procedures for students and staff who develop symptoms during school hours. This is particularly important when operating in-school testing programs where students may receive positive test results during school hours and need to be isolated before being picked up from school. Processes and procedures developed for the 2021-2022 school year may be appropriate for this purpose, but they should be updated to current guidelines if necessary. Students and staff with symptoms should be tested regardless of their vaccination status. If the individual has had a COVID-19 infection within the past 90 days and are again symptomatic, an antigen test should be used for testing, rather than PCR, during that 90-day period.

Students Unable to Wear A Mask

Some students are unable to wear a mask due to communication or sensory processing disorders. For these students, vaccine advocacy and access are a priority. It is recommended that parents of children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) have discussions with their child's IEP team early in the school year, regarding what options may be available to them. If exposed to COVID-19 and unable to wear a mask for 10 days, schools should consider accommodations such as daily testing during the 10-day period, if possible, and closely monitor for symptoms. People who test positive for COVID-19 and are unable to wear a mask should either isolate at home for 10 full days or follow the test-based strategy to determine when they can safely return to school without a mask.

Sports and Extracurricular Activities

Students who were exposed to COVID-19 and who wish to take part in sports or extracurricular activities should wear a well-fitting mask during these activities for 10 days, if possible. For sports and activities during which a mask cannot be worn, all students (whether up to date on vaccinations or not) should participate in daily testing for 10 days or, alternatively, avoid engaging in these activities for 10 days.

Contact Tracing

Contact tracing and case investigation are no longer universally recommended—however, contact tracing can still be a helpful strategy when a school is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak. In these circumstances, schools and districts should focus on close contacts of individuals who started having symptoms or tested positive within the last three to five days. When considering contact tracing and case investigation strategies, availability of daily testing programs is an important factor that should be considered along with equitable access for all students and staff.

Schools and districts should continue communicating with the school community regarding positive cases by maintaining the COVID-19 dashboard.

Masking

Masking is no longer a state requirement for students and staff. However, proper use of a well-fitting mask reduces the risk of spreading COVID-19 and is recommended by the CDC at high COVID-19 community levels. Anyone who chooses to wear a mask, even in low- or medium- COVID-19 community levels, should be permitted to do so. Those who are immunocompromised, at risk for getting extremely sick from COVID-19, or those who have recently been exposed should continue wearing masks.

Schools should consider flexible policies and practices that support individuals who choose to wear masks, regardless of the COVID-19 community levels. For current CDC recommendations on masking, guidance is available on its [website](#).

Ventilation

Proper ventilation is an important way that schools and districts can prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, including influenza, in their facilities. The CDC website offers guidance on best practices for [ventilation](#). The recommendations include bringing in as much outdoor air as possible; ensuring that heating, ventilation, and air conditioning settings are maximizing ventilation; filtering and cleaning the air in the school using HEPA-type filters; using exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens; and opening windows in school buses and other transportation vehicles. Many schools and districts enhanced school ventilation during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. Schools that have not made critical ventilation upgrades should consider doing so before the 2022-2023 school year.

Other Preventive Measures

Schools and districts have also implemented a range of other prevention strategies at their facilities. Many of these practices, including proper ventilation, hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection, are still recommended strategies for preventing spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. For current recommended practices, please visit the CDC web pages for [cleaning and disinfection](#), and [hand washing](#).

DPH Liaisons and CDC Foundation (CDCF) School Liaisons

DPH Liaisons continue to be a primary resource as we transition from pandemic to endemic. It is expected that two DPH liaisons will remain accessible to all schools for public health consultations. The DPH liaisons are available to assist in navigating the most up to date guidance, reviewing complex cases and advising next steps during potential outbreaks.

CDCF school liaisons, funded by a federal grant, provided much needed support for COVID-19 related tasks and duties. Districts and schools were able to use the CDCF school liaisons to assist in coordinating testing, managing schedules, and communicating with vendors, families, and school staff. The federal funding for the CDCF school liaisons has been extended to at least October 15, 2022 and the State is finalizing extension through the rest of the school year. Schools and districts with CDCF school liaisons can use the additional personnel to help implement COVID-19 prevention strategies (such as those outlined in this document) for the upcoming school year. For example, CDCF school liaisons can assist with duties such as tracking, reporting and documenting cases and household contacts, communication efforts with families and school staff, and administrative responsibilities to help implement testing and vaccination options. CDCF school liaisons may provide additional support to address the health and well-being of students such as reviewing immunization records, coordinating screenings and health promotion education and activities.

School Health: Open Office Hours/Community of Practice

Virtual meetings were integral in facilitating collaboration between schools, DOE, DPH and CDCF throughout the pandemic. CDC, DPH updates and mitigation strategies were quickly disseminated through this forum. These virtual meetings will continue to be offered to provide support to school nurses as we move forward post-pandemic.

Updated Isolation and Exposure Guidance for K – 12 School Settings



Calculating number of days: If you **test positive** for COVID-19 and have symptoms, Day 0 is your first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after your symptoms developed. For **asymptomatic cases**, Day 0 is the date of the positive test; however, if symptoms develop within 10 days, then the clock restarts at Day 0 on the day of symptom onset. For **exposures** Day 0 is the day of the last exposure to the positive case.

TEST
POSITIVE
FOR
COVID-19

ISOLATE – For 5 days, regardless of vaccination status

- Report positive case to school nurse/COVID Coordinator and follow school guidance.
- If unable to wear a mask isolate at home for 10 days.

With Symptoms:

You can end isolation **5 days after** symptoms first appeared

- **IF:** 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications
- **IF:** Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving (loss of taste/smell may last weeks and should not delay end of isolation)
- **AND:** Wear a well-fitting mask for the following 5 days when around others, both at home, and outside-of-the home.*

Without Symptoms:

- **Isolate for 5 days** since your positive COVID-19 test. Wear a well-fitting mask for the following 5 days when around others, both at home, and outside-of-the home.*

*Alternatively, schools may choose a **test-based strategy** to allow students/staff to remove their masks sooner:

- If they have two sequential negative antigen tests, 48 hours apart, with the first test occurring on day 6, masks can be removed after the second negative test.
- If either test is positive, they should continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours before taking another test. They should continue wearing a mask and taking antigen tests 48 hours apart until they have two sequential negative test results.

EXPOSED TO
COVID-19

After exposure, start precautions immediately:

- **No quarantine** is necessary, per updated CDC guidelines
- **Wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days** around others
- Test on day 5 (or as soon as possible thereafter) after your exposure
- **If unable to wear a mask**, may return to school if participating in daily testing from days 1 – 10
- If symptoms develop, **STAY HOME**, isolate immediately and get a test

These procedures outline general guidelines, but each case is assessed based on the facts of each unique situation.

For more information, see [CDC's Operational Guidance](#) for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support in-Person Learning

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Appendix B: Sample COVID-19 Email Communications to Parents and Guardians

Announcing Testing Program

Subject line: Sign up your child for rapid COVID-19 testing at school

[SCHOOL NAME HERE] OFFERS COVID-19 TESTING FOR STUDENTS

Dear Parent/Guardian:

During the upcoming 2022-2023 school year, we are committed to keeping all students and staff in school and knowing that their school environment is as safe as possible from outbreaks. This year, [School Name Here] offers symptomatic point of care (POC) antigen testing, daily POC antigen testing for students who are household contacts and may offer surveillance testing depending on community transmission levels. The test takes a few minutes to perform and can be completed in a few simple steps.

Additionally, during the school year, we will be actively distributing over the counter (OTC) antigen tests to our students and staff. We encourage you to actively use these tests specifically after holidays or long weekends to ensure all our children can safely remain in school.

To learn more about why it's important to test your children, visit [Delaware's COVID-19 Testing web page](#).

COVID-19 cases are still a significant concern — and testing is one of the best ways to identify them and stop the virus from spreading.

We will send you more information about how to enroll your child in the testing program in the near future.

Thank you.

[Name]

[Position]

[School Name]

Appendix C: COVID-19 Testing Processes

Tips for Putting Students at Ease for Testing

- Explain that the student/staff will keep their masks on until it is time to obtain the specimen.
- Provide reassurance that you are going to help them through the process. It is important to recognize any worries or concerns they may have and address them.
- Talk with the student/staff that the most important thing for getting the test done quickly is that they remain still.
- Explain that most people experience either a slight itch or a tickle during the test. They may cough, sneeze, or have their eyes water. These are natural reactions and will disappear.
- Prior to the procedure, tell the student/staff what you need to do in simple terms and answer any questions. Show the student/staff the supplies you will be using to obtain the specimen. Explain that you will be inserting the swab only a ½ inch to an inch and NOT way back.
- Provide the student/staff with a tissue for the nose to use after. Do not wipe the nose before the test to allow for the most available secretions.
- Observe for obstruction and inquire if there is a history of recent injury or nasal surgery. If noted, consult the student's PCP, for further instruction.

In-School Antigen Testing Procedures

- Perform [proper hand hygiene](#).
- School nurse (or other trained healthcare provider) must wear [proper PPE](#).
- Explain the process to the student/staff as described above before proceeding.
- Follow test manufacturer instructions.
- Note that serial testing--repeating another antigen test 2 days after a negative result--is recommended by FDA and many test manufacturers. If an individual has COVID-19 symptoms and the first rapid antigen test is negative, recommend testing again 48 hours after the first negative test. Repeat testing may be performed with in-school or home antigen testing, or through community testing locations.