

**San Mateo County Coalition
for Safe Schools and Communities**

Safe Schools Respiratory Illness Framework

August 20, 2024

**The Guidance Will Continue to Be Updated as
New Information Becomes Available**



**Coalition for
Safe Schools &
Communities**



**SAN MATEO
COUNTY
OFFICE OF
EDUCATION**



**SAN MATEO
COUNTY HEALTH**
All together better.

Table of Contents

About this Document	3
Considerations	3
Vaccination	4
Air Quality	4
Outdoor Learning	6
Masks	6
Maintaining Good Hygiene	7
Case Reporting	8
Cleaning	9
Testing for COVID-19	9
CDPH Recommendations for COVID-19 and Other Communicable Diseases	11
Responding to Positive Cases of COVID-19	14
Notifications to Families and Staff	15
Training	15
Outbreak Definitions	15
Appendix and Communication Tools	15

About this Document

The Safe Schools Respiratory Illness Framework reflects the most current and updated focus on addressing common **communicable respiratory diseases**, including COVID-19. This document was developed in consultation with San Mateo County Health (SMCH) and reflects **California Department of Public Health (CDPH)**, **California Occupational Division of Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA)**, **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** and other relevant guidance. It has been and will continue to be updated as needed to reflect changes in official health department guidance.

The Safe Schools Respiratory Illness Framework addresses TK-12 schools, early education sites, child care settings, before and after school programs, and summer and intersession programs.

Considerations

Schools can and should expect that children and staff will experience illness during the school year. This Framework is designed to help schools manage and mitigate illness in the school setting and reflects CDPH and CDC recommendations to align COVID-19 related actions with those of other common respiratory viruses. These recommendations are more focused on responding to symptoms rather than positive tests, while reducing social interruption.

The guidance continues to build upon a multi-layer strategy used to manage COVID-19 and serves as a general prevention framework to reduce the spread of multiple types of infections, including COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and norovirus. Strategies are guided by the principle that safe, in-person learning and care are critical to the well-being and development of children.

CDPH and SMCH recommend that school administrators and child care providers communicate their health and safety strategies to children, parents, and staff, utilizing multiple strategies including parent communications and on-site reminders. Communication should be provided in the languages of community members.

CDPH and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) affirm the authority of local health departments, local educational agencies, and child care providers to maintain or establish additional guidance, including required actions, for facilities in their respective jurisdictions.

Please direct any questions about this document and the guidance reflected within to the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) at info@smcoe.org or 650-802-5515.

Additional resources can be found on the **[CDPH Safe Schools for All Hub](#)**

Vaccination

Vaccinations (also referred to as “immunizations”) can help protect against certain diseases by working with the body’s natural defenses to safely build immunity to disease. Vaccinations protect the person who receives the vaccination. In addition, if many people are vaccinated, this reduces the burden of disease in communities and protects individuals who are not vaccinated and those individuals who may not develop a strong immune response from vaccination.

CDPH-recommended actions:

1. Encourage children, families, and staff to stay up-to-date on all [vaccinations](#) recommended by their health care provider.
2. Review vaccination requirements for entry into [K–12 schools](#) and [pre-K/child care settings](#). Visit the CDPH [Shots for School site](#) or San Mateo County Health’s [Immunization Programs and Vaccines site](#) for resources related to school or child care immunization requirements.
3. Of note, COVID-19 and influenza vaccines are not included in the list of required immunizations for [school](#) or [child care](#) (see Title 17, Cal. Code of Regulations, section 6000 et seq.). However, both COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations can greatly reduce the risk of serious illness, outbreaks, absences and school disruptions, and are strongly recommended for all eligible people in California, including children, providers, teachers, staff and individuals sharing homes with child care community members. More information may be found at [CDPH Get the Facts on COVID-19 Vaccines](#).
4. Encourage families and staff to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment with their health care provider or go to [Myturn.ca.gov](#).

Air Quality

The risk of getting and spreading respiratory infections is greater in indoor settings with poor air quality. Effective ventilation and filtration can reduce the spread of these infections and may also protect students, children, and staff from exposure to wildfire smoke, airborne allergens, and other pollutants.

When Outdoor Air Quality is Good

Bringing fresh outdoor air into a building helps keep virus particles from concentrating inside. This can be done by opening multiple doors and windows, using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.

For indoor spaces, ventilation should be optimized. Recommendations include:

- Open windows and doors as safety and weather permit. Per Cal/OSHA, maximize outside air provided except when EPA Air Quality Index is greater than 100 for any pollutant.
- Consider the use of sensors or other assessment tools to monitor ventilation systems and CO₂ levels.
- Ventilation system should provide at least the code-required minimum ventilation rate.
- Ventilation system filters should be MERV-rated at MERV 13 or better. They should also be properly installed (i.e., no gaps that would allow air to bypass the filter) and properly maintained (i.e., replaced as often as recommended).
- In-room (portable) air cleaners used to reduce the risk of long-range airborne transmission should provide high-efficiency filtration and a sufficient “clean air delivery rate” (CADR) (i.e., at least 2/3 of the floor area). Multiple devices per classroom may be necessary for sufficient total air cleaning.
- Optimize ventilation in transport vehicles, such as buses or vans. Open windows to increase airflow from outside when feasible and safe to do so.
- Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens.
- Explore the use of state and federal funding for ventilation upgrades.

The [CDPH Safe Schools for All Hub](#) includes several excellent resources that address indoor air quality in schools.

When Outdoor Air Quality is Poor

- If outside air quality is poor, doors and windows should be shut.
- Classes being held outdoors should be relocated inside.
- If the HVAC filter was upgraded (HEPA or MERV-13 or higher is recommended), set the central system’s circulating fan to operate continuously (set to “ON” rather than “AUTO”). HVAC, air conditioning wall units, and fans without upgraded filters should be turned off.
- Use a portable air cleaner in one or more rooms. Portable air cleaners work best when run continuously with doors and windows closed.
- According to the [California Air Resource Board](#), a well-fitted NIOSH-certified N95 mask can provide protection from wildfire smoke. Cloth masks will not provide protection from wildfire smoke.
- When air quality improves, even temporarily, “air out” buildings to reduce indoor air pollution.
- Damp mop, dust, and clean with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter-equipped vacuum.

- Schools may consider dismissing students until air quality improves and proper ventilation in indoor classrooms/common areas can resume.

For resources and guidance on air quality, visit SMCOE's [website](#).

Outdoor Learning

Holding classes and programs outdoors adds an additional layer of protection for the school community. Outdoor spaces for classes and programs provide schools with more options for meeting student needs, including reducing stress, improving mental and physical health, and helping to heal trauma. Resources to support outdoor learning can be found on [SMCOE's website](#).

Masks

Masks, particularly **high-quality and well-fitting masks**, are effective, inexpensive, and easy to implement tools to protect oneself and mitigate transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

CDPH recommendations include:

- Develop and implement local protocols to provide appropriately-sized, high-quality masks to children who do not have one and desire to use one.
- Wear a mask around others if you have respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, runny nose, and/or sore throat).
- Staff who test positive for COVID, **are required** to wear a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days since onset of their symptoms or positive test date, especially in indoor settings. Also when returning to work after ending isolation with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and symptoms are improving, extra precautions such as hand washing and physical distancing should be taken.
- Students who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have returned to school with lessening symptoms and no fever without the use of fever reducing medication, should wear a mask for 5 days
- Wearing a mask is always important to protect those who are at higher risk for getting ill from COVID -19.
- Consider wearing a mask when caring for sick children.

The following individuals should not wear face masks:

- Infants and children younger than 2 years old because of the risk of suffocation;
- All persons when they are eating or sleeping;

- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that precludes wearing a mask safely and effectively. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a mask could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance; and
- Persons for whom wearing a mask would create a safety hazard to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

Requirements for Masks

- CDPH requires that no person can be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into a school, unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard.
- Cal/OSHA requires schools to provide masks and when required by CDPH or after a workplace exposure.

Types of Masks

CDPH provides the following recommendations on the types of masks and how to wear them:

- An effective mask has both good fit and good filtration.
- Gaps between the face and mask, such as above the nose or at the sides, allow air carrying virus particles to easily leak in or out without being filtered.
- Generally, masks that have head loops (rather than ear loops) have better fit, forcing the air that you breathe in and out to go through the mask and be filtered.

Read more in the CDPH’s [When and Where to Wear a Mask](#) resource.

Maintaining Good Hygiene

Hand hygiene can prevent the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. The following are recommended actions:

- Teach and reinforce among students and staff:
 - Washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - Avoiding contact with one’s eyes, nose, and mouth
 - Covering coughs and sneezes among students and staff
- Promote hand washing throughout the day, especially before and after eating, after using the toilet, and after handling bodily fluids, trash, or removing gloves. Post hand washing educational materials.

- Ensure adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, tissues, no-touch trash cans, masks, and hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent ethyl alcohol for staff and children who can safely use hand sanitizer.
- Hand sanitizers should be stored up, away, and out of sight of young children and should be used only with adult supervision for children under six years of age.
- Discourage sharing of personal items. This includes cups, food, utensils, water bottles, lip balm, cell phones, and makeup.

Required Actions:

- Cal/OSHA states that employers must provide for, encourage, and allow time for frequent hand washing, and provide hand sanitizer.

Case Reporting

Schools are required to report cases of communicable diseases, including COVID-19, to the local health agency per California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 17, [§2500](#) and [§2508](#). Note that CCR Title 17 §2500 has been temporarily modified by the [State Public Health Officer Order of October 4, 2022](#).

Child care centers ([CCR Title 22 section 101212\(d\)](#)) and family child care homes ([CCR Title 22 section 102416.2\(c\)\(3\)](#)) should also review Child Care Licensing requirements for outbreak reporting and consult their [local regional office](#) (PDF) for assistance.

Workplaces, schools and certain child care providers are subject to COVID-19 workplace outbreak reporting requirements set forth in [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations FAQ](#).

San Mateo County Health’s reporting requirements reflect these legal requirements and streamline the process for schools and districts. The reporting requirements are as follows:

- As employers, schools and districts shall promptly notify SMCH when **3 or more cases** of epidemiologically linked COVID-19 are identified among school, district, or other
- Provide a written notice within 24 hours of exposure to all employees, and the employers of subcontracted employees, who were at the same worksite as a reported case within the case’s infectious period.
- Maintain accurate records and track all COVID-19 cases while ensuring medical information remains confidential. These records must be made available to employees, authorized employee representatives, or as otherwise required by law, with personal identifying information removed.
- Report a COVID-19-related serious illness or death immediately to the nearest Cal/OSHA enforcement district office.

- If cases appear to be increasing rapidly, school liaisons should report that to SMCCDControl@smcgov.org or HLT_Covid19_SchoolTeam@smcgov.org for guidance.

Schools or districts with questions or concerns about COVID-19 cases may contact SMCH at COVID19_SchoolTeam@smcgov.org or (650)573-2346. For questions about other reportable communicable illnesses, email SMCCDControl@smcgov.org.

Cleaning

Clean and well-maintained facilities can help reduce the spread of communicable diseases that are transmitted by contact with contaminated or high touch surfaces. Cleaning desks everyday has been shown to mitigate the spread of disease.

CDPH recommends the following:

- Routine daily cleaning with water and mild detergent is generally sufficient to remove most bacteria and viruses from surfaces, although additional sanitization might be necessary during certain disease outbreaks.
- School administrators and child care providers should consult with local health departments when there is an outbreak.
- If disinfectants are used, use [asthma-safer products](#).
- Drinking fountains should be open for use by students and staff. Routine cleaning is recommended.
- Train staff to follow the infection control practices for cleaning and disinfection, housekeeping and sanitation principles, and universal health precautions and monitor compliance. The Healthy Schools Act requires anyone who uses disinfectants at a school or child care center to complete the [annual California Department of Pesticide Regulation-approved training](#). Note: This requirement does not apply to family child care homes.

Testing for COVID-19

At-home antigen-based testing provides individuals with convenient, rapid, and accurate test results. The ability for symptomatic individuals to test and identify the presence of COVID-19 quickly is important.

CDC no longer recommends testing for those individuals who **are not symptomatic or** have had a previous infection within the last 30 days.

Regardless of immunization status, individuals should get tested immediately if they're feeling ill with any COVID-19 symptoms.

Those who are more likely to become very ill from COVID-19 should consider testing within 5 days after exposure even if they do not have symptoms. [COVID-19 medication](#) works best if started right away.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 (CDPH)		
• Headache	• New loss of taste or smell	• Fatigue (tiredness)
• Fever or chills	• Sore throat	• Diarrhea
• Cough	• Congestion or runny nose	• Muscle or body aches
• Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing	• Nausea or vomiting	

Those who have a positive COVID-19 test should follow [CDC's guidance](#) for when you're sick with a respiratory illness.

Visit the State of California's [COVID-19 page](#) for information on treatment options. Medications to treat COVID-19 are widely available, and effective at reducing the severity of COVID-19 illness.

Ca/OSHA Testing Requirements for Staff

As employers, schools must offer testing at no cost and during paid time to employees who had a close contact at work, as follows:

- Who had a close contact with a person with COVID-19 during their infectious period except for recently recovered employee COVID-19 cases without symptoms.
- During an outbreak, make COVID-19 testing available to all employees within the exposed group, except for employees who were not at work during the relevant period and symptom-free employees who recently recovered from COVID-19.

Schools must also provide testing in a manner that ensures employee confidentiality.

Schools should consult for current requirements for employers, and specifically [Non-Emergency Regulations FAQs on Testing](#), for information on testing of workplace close contacts after workplace exposure. During workplace outbreaks, additional testing is required.

- At-home tests are meant to be used at home by individuals or parents/guardians.
- At-home test kits can be used beyond their [expiration date](#) as long as the internal control line after test development is both easily visible and the color specified by the specific test instructions.
- At-home tests can be disposed of in the regular trash.

- See [CDPH's testing FAQ](#) for more information.

Required COVID-19 Testing Plans

SB 1479 requires LEAs to create and post on their public website a COVID-19 testing plan. The testing plan must be consistent with CDPH guidance for K-12 schools. San Mateo County LEAs may:

- Adopt CHPH's and post a link to the guidance on their website, or
- Develop their own plan and post it on their website.

According to [SB 1479](#), LEAs are not required to maintain an on-site program or have a designated staff member to oversee testing.

CDPH Recommendations for COVID-19 and Other Communicable Diseases

- Both staff and students should stay home whenever they are sick.
- Schools must balance disease mitigation against the social, educational, and mental health disruption that it causes.
- Children should return to school as soon as they are fever free, symptoms are improving, and they are able to participate.
- In most cases a doctor's note to return to school is not necessary and places an undue burden on the family and the health care system
- Follow [CDPH guidance](#) for when a child has symptoms of illness in a school or child care to support decision-making.
- Avoid policies that incentivize coming to school or child care while sick.
- Share educational resources and health-related information (e.g., [AAP Healthy Children](#)) with the school community when appropriate.
- CDC and CDPH no longer recommend five days of isolation. Instead, they focus on clinical symptoms to determine when to end isolation.
- Both agencies now recommend the following actions to align with common practice of other respiratory viruses. [These actions](#) outline what to do when a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 and how to protect others, including the most vulnerable in the community.

- The potential infectious period is 2 days before the date of symptoms began or the positive test date (if no symptoms) through Day 10. (Day 0 is the symptom onset date or positive test date).
- As employers, schools are subject to the Cal/OSHA [COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations](#) and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.
- Anyone with COVID-19 should avoid contact with people at higher-risk for severe COVID-19 for 10 days. Higher-risk individuals include the elderly, those who live in congregate care facilities, those who have immunocompromising conditions, and that put them at higher risk for serious illness.
- Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, particularly if they are at [higher risk for severe COVID-19](#) should speak with a healthcare provider as soon as they test positive about [treatment options](#). They may be eligible for [antiviral medicines](#) or other treatments for COVID-19. COVID-19 antiviral medicines work best if taken as soon as possible, and within 5 days from when symptoms start.

Recommendations for Those Who Test Positive for COVID-19

Students with COVID-19 Symptoms

1. Students experiencing symptoms should mask and test
2. If they are positive, they should continue to mask and isolate
3. Students should stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms, until
 - they have not had a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication

AND

 - other [COVID-19 symptoms](#) are mild and improving.
4. Students should wear a mask when they are around other people indoors for the 5 days after they become sick or test positive.

Students with No COVID-19 Symptoms

Do not need to test and should remain in school, even if they have been a close contact.

Staff with COVID-19 Symptoms

Staff experiencing symptoms are required to mask and test.

If positive for COVID-19, they must continue to mask and isolate.

1. Staff should stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms, until
 - they have not had a fever for 24 hours without using fever reducing medication AND
 - other **COVID-19 symptoms** are mild and improving.
2. Staff must wear a mask when they are around other people indoors for the 10 days after they become sick or test positive. Day 0 is symptom onset date or positive test date.

Recommendations for Close Contacts of Cases

- If a close contact develops new COVID-19 symptoms, they should mask and test right away.

As employers, schools are subject to the Cal/OSHA **COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations** and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.

DEFINITIONS

High-Risk Contact: A high-risk contact is someone who:

- may experience severe illness if they become infected with COVID-19 (for example, due to being elderly, unvaccinated or immunocompromised);
- may be more likely to transmit the virus to those who are at higher risk for severe COVID-19; and/or
- has higher transmission potential (more likely to spread virus to others due to high intensity/duration of indoor exposure to others).

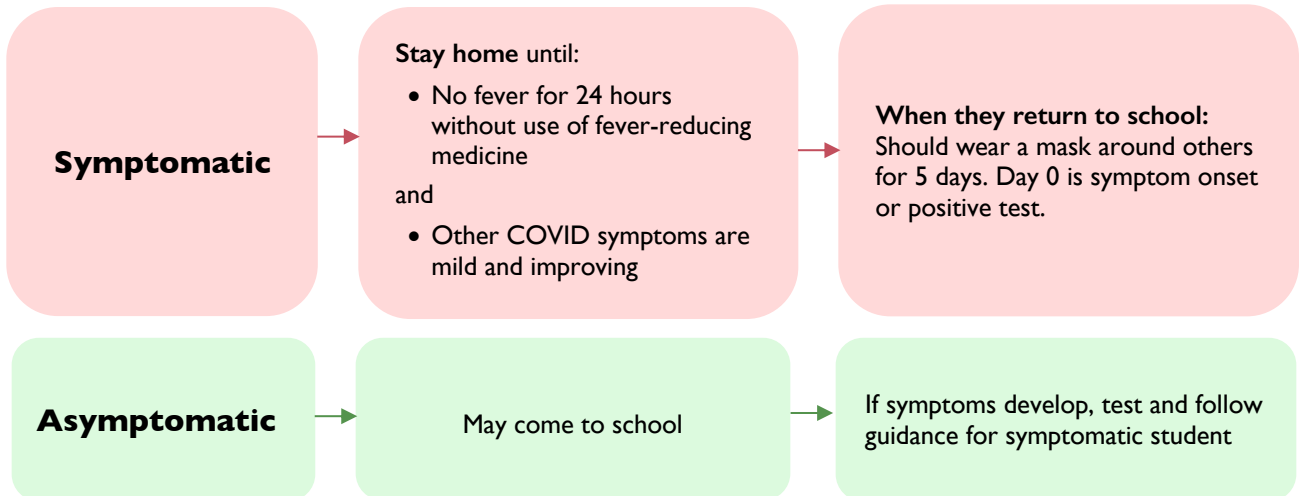
Close Contact:

- In indoor spaces of 400,000 or fewer cubic feet per floor, a close contact is defined as sharing the same indoor airspace as an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) during a confirmed case's infectious period.
- In large indoor spaces greater than 400,000 cubic feet per floor, a close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period during the confirmed case's infectious period.

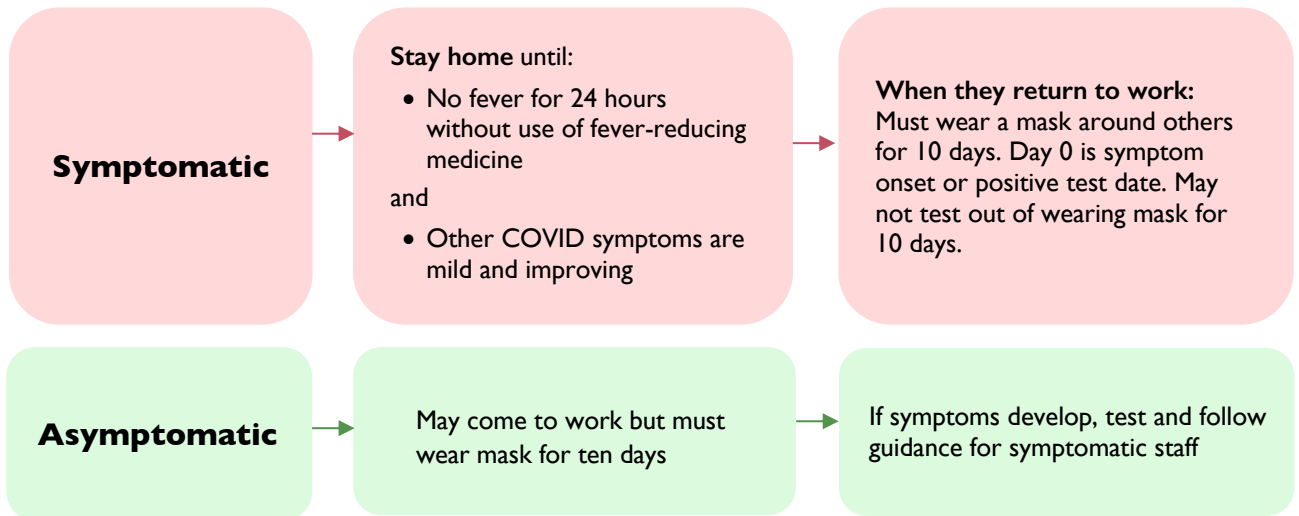
Spaces that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls (e.g., offices, suites, rooms, waiting areas, bathrooms, or break or eating areas that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls) must be considered distinct indoor airspaces.

Responding to Positive Cases of COVID-19

Students Who Test Positive for COVID (CDPH)

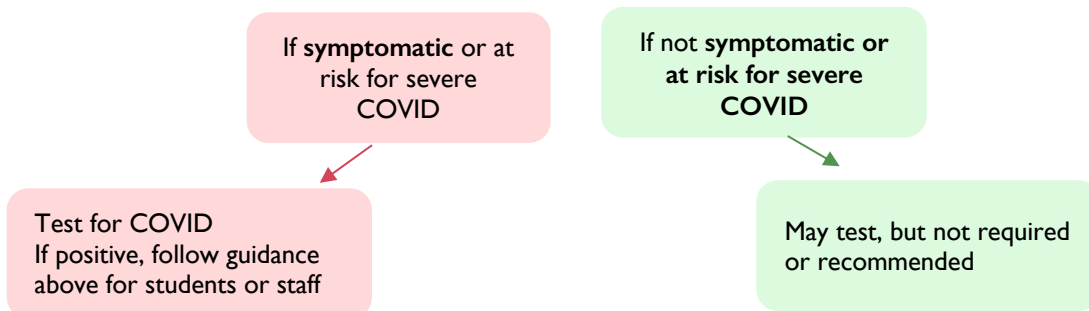


Staff Who Test Positive for COVID (CalOSHA)



Note: Anyone with COVID-19 should avoid contact with people at higher-risk for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.

Close Contacts



Notifications to Families and Staff

In lieu of individual exposure notifications, schools should consider providing a general notification to the entire school community during times of elevated community transmission. This communication can alert all to the increased potential of being exposed due to a rise in cases among school and community members and remind all to monitor for symptoms.

Per [CalOSHA](#), schools must notify employees of COVID-19 cases in the workplace.

Training

According to Cal/OSHA, employers must provide effective training and instruction to employees on how COVID-19 is spread and infection prevention techniques.

Outbreak Definitions

At least three COVID-19 cases within a 7-day period among people who are epidemiologically linked in the setting, and are not known to be close contacts of each other in any other case investigation,

Cal/OSHA provides the following guidance for employers in the case of an outbreak:

- Provide written notice of workplace outbreaks (three or more cases in an exposed workgroup in a 14-day period) and major outbreaks (20 or more cases within a 30-day period).

Appendix and Communication Tools

- [Testing Guidance and Resources from the California Department of Public Health](#)
- [CDPH Symptoms Guidance](#)
 - [School Template Letter for Sending Symptomatic Child/Student Home](#) (Word)
 - Other Languages: [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), [Armenian](#), [Chinese-Simplified](#), [Chinese-Traditional](#), [Hmong](#), [Khmer](#), [Korean](#), [Punjabi](#), [Russian](#), [Tagalog](#), [Tahi](#), [Vietnamese](#)
 - [Two-Page Summary-When to Keep Your Child Home From School or Child Care](#) (PDF)
 - Other Languages: [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), [Armenian](#), [Chinese-Simplified](#), [Chinese-Traditional](#), [Hmong](#), [Khmer](#), [Korean](#), [Punjabi](#), [Russian](#), [Tagalog](#), [Tahi](#), [Vietnamese](#)
- [CDPH Public Health Guidance for Schools](#)
- [Cal OSHA Non-Emergency](#)
- [Cal OSHA Model CCP](#)