

Overview of COVID-19 Quarantine for K-12 Schools

What is quarantine?

Quarantine is a strategy used to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, by keeping people who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 apart from others.

People quarantine when they have been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19, based on their vaccination and booster status or history of prior infection in the past 90 days.

Quarantine means staying home for at least 5 days after exposure to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. This is because someone can be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 but may not show symptoms. Even though someone may not show symptoms, they can still spread the virus.

Quarantine is different from isolation. Isolation is used by someone who has symptoms of COVID-19, or tests positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, even if they don't have symptoms. Isolation helps prevent transmission of the virus by separating people infected with the virus from those who are not infected. If someone takes a diagnostic test for COVID-19 and tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 or develops symptoms of COVID-19 regardless of whether or not they have tested positive for COVID-19 while in quarantine, their status will shift from quarantine to isolation.

Who needs to quarantine?

People who had close contact with someone with COVID-19 should follow CDC recommendations to protect themselves and others. Recommendations for close contacts to quarantine and get tested will vary depending on vaccination status and prior COVID-19

diagnosis within the past 90 days. People who have come into close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 should follow the recommendations outlined on the COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation webpage.

To allow time for students to catch up with the latest recommendations and to minimize disruption to in-person learning, schools may consider forgoing quarantine for students ages 12-17 years who completed their primary vaccine series but have not yet received all eligible boosters.

Everyone who is a close contact should wear a well-fitting mask around others and watch for COVID-19 symptoms for 10 days from the date of their last close contact with someone with COVID-19 (the date of last close contact is considered day 0). They should also get tested at least 5 days after having close contact with someone with COVID-19 unless they had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days and subsequently recovered. Those who test positive or develop COVID-19 symptoms should follow recommendations for isolation.

CDC continues to recommend indoor masking in K-12 schools for all individuals ages 2 years and older, including students, teachers, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. The school should ensure that there is a plan for people identified as close contacts to stay masked at all times indoors until 10 full days after their last close contact to someone with COVID-19. During times in

the school day when students or staff members may typically remove masks indoors (such as during lunches, snacks, band practice, etc.), have a plan for them to adequately distance from others and ensure they wear their masks when not actively participating in these activities (such as when they are not actively eating).

What should a student or staff member do during quarantine?

People who are asked to quarantine should take the following steps:

- Stay home and away from other people for at least 5 days (day 0 through day 5) after their last close contact with a person who has COVID-19. The date of exposure is considered day 0. Wear a well-fitting mask when around others at home, if possible.
- For 10 days after their last close contact to someone with COVID-19, watch for fever (100.4°F or greater), cough, shortness of breath, or other COVID-19 symptoms.
- If they develop symptoms, get tested immediately and isolate until they receive their test results. If they test positive, follow isolation recommendations.
- If they do not develop symptoms, get tested at least 5 days after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- If they test negative, they can leave home, but continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around others at home and in public until 10 days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19.

- If they test positive, they should isolate for at least 5 days from the date of their positive test (if they do not have symptoms). If they do develop COVID-19 symptoms, isolate for at least 5 days from the date their symptoms began (the date the symptoms started is day 0).
- - If they are unable to get a test 5 days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19, they can leave their home after day 5 if they have been without COVID-19 symptoms throughout the 5-day period. Wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the date of last close contact when around others at home and in public.
- - Avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and nursing homes and other high-risk settings, until after at least 10 days.

- If possible, stay away from people they live with, especially people who are at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19, as well as others outside their home throughout the full 10 days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- If they are unable to quarantine, they should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days when around others at home and in public.
- If they are unable to wear a mask when around others, they should continue to quarantine for 10 days.
- Avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and nursing homes and other high-risk settings, until after at least 10 days.

Please visit CDC's COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation page for general guidance on quarantine.

Can a student or staff member continue to go to school while in quarantine?

No. CDC recommends students and staff who are asked to quarantine should not go to school or school events in-person during their quarantine period unless they are participating in a school sponsored “Test to Stay” program.

How should “Test to Stay” be implemented in light of the updated shortened quarantine and isolation timeframe?

Test to Stay (TTS) can be implemented by schools as an alternative to traditional quarantine at home by establishing testing protocols to perform at least two tests during the period between close contact notification/TTS enrollment and day 7 after exposure, with the last test occurring 5-7 days after last close contact with a person confirmed with COVID-19. For more information about TTS, visit [What You Should Know About COVID-19 Testing in Schools](#).

What activities can a student or staff member participate in while in quarantine?

A student or staff member should participate in only online or virtual school activities during their quarantine period. They may complete work or assignments from home during this time, depending on how well they feel. They can engage with other students, teachers, or staff through phone conversations, online meetings, or fully virtual engagement.

It is important for a student or staff member in quarantine to remain at home, separated from other people as much as possible, during the entire quarantine period. They should not attend other extra-curricular or social activities while they are in quarantine. They should not participate in activities like sporting events, play dates, parties, social and family gatherings, music or theater performances, and other events where they may come into contact with other people. To prevent other people from possibly getting COVID-19, make every effort to limit the person’s contact with other people, including members of their household, while they are in quarantine, even if the person is wearing a mask.