

VDH Isolation and Quarantine FAQs for K-12 Schools

Date last updated: December 30, 2021

The information provided in these FAQs is interim guidance for K-12 schools and is a supplement to VDH's [Exposed to COVID-19](#) and [If you are sick](#) web pages. VDH will update guidance for K-12 when CDC K-12 guidance becomes available. (The guidance below does not specifically apply to early childhood education or child care centers.)

1. What are the new Isolation and Quarantine guidelines from the CDC? (Last updated 12/30/21)

- **If you have a positive COVID-19 test**, the isolation time has been shortened from the prior 10 days to 5 days, as long as:
 - You have no symptoms, or your symptoms are getting better.
 - You wear a well-fitting mask when you are around others for an additional 5 days after your isolation period ends.

Note: If you have a fever, continue to stay home until your fever is gone for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.

- **If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19**, the updated requirements for your quarantine period include:
 - If you are unvaccinated or have not yet gotten your recommended booster dose (more than 6 months since your second mRNA dose or more than 2 months after the J&J vaccine), you should (1) quarantine for 5 days as long as you do not develop symptoms within that time and (2) wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days when you are around others.
 - If you have received your booster shot or received your second mRNA dose within the last 6 months (or received a single J&J dose within the last 2 months), you do *not* need to quarantine following an exposure, but should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the exposure when you are around others.
 - If you have been exposed, VDH recommends taking a COVID-19 test 5 days after exposure. (Due to testing limitations, a test within 3-5 days after an exposure is acceptable). If you do develop symptoms, you should immediately quarantine until a negative test confirms symptoms are not from COVID-19.

2. How do the new CDC isolation and quarantine guidelines affect schools? (Last updated 12/30/21)

School districts may choose to continue more stringent isolation and quarantine requirements or may implement the new CDC guidance.

In the absence of updated guidance from CDC, VDH recommends the following interim guidance to address specific situations:

- The new guidelines apply to K-12 settings when individuals can properly and consistently mask for an additional 5 days after ending their 5 day isolation or quarantine.
- For isolation (people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19):
 - If an individual is unable to consistently and correctly wear a mask (e.g., young children, developmental issues, etc.), they should isolate at home **for the full 10 days**.
- For quarantine (certain people exposed to someone with COVID-19):
 - If an individual is unvaccinated or has not yet received their recommended booster dose (more than 6 months since the second mRNA dose or more than 2 months after the J&J vaccine), and is unable to consistently and correctly wear a mask, they should quarantine at home **for the full 10 days**.
 - In the absence of further guidance from CDC, if a child was fully vaccinated more than 6 months ago, but is not currently eligible to receive a booster (specifically children aged 12-15 years), they should follow the previous guidance for fully vaccinated individuals, which does not require them to quarantine after an exposure. They should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days. VDH is making this interim recommendation balancing disruptions to in-person learning with the risk of transmission.

3. Do VDH and all of its local health departments recommend quarantine for unvaccinated and not fully vaccinated school-age children? (Last updated 12/30/21)

Yes. VDH recognizes that there are some situations in which individuals are not able to comply with quarantine. However, quarantine remains the best practice and safest option.

The VDH recommendation is that school-age children should quarantine. If an individual is unable to quarantine, VDH is not able to enforce it. Feasibility of quarantine is a decision that must be made in consultation between families and schools, and must include the student's ability to correctly and consistently use well-fitting masks and obtain recommended testing.

4. How should lunch time be handled for children who are in the 6-10 day period after isolation or quarantine? (Last updated 12/30/21)

Children who are in the 6-10 day period after isolation or quarantine should ideally be 6 feet away from others during meals and snacks, or other unmasked periods. To ensure confidentiality, VDH recommends that all students maintain 6 feet of distance between

each other during unmasked periods. If a child with COVID-19 is in the 6-10 day isolation period and they spend greater than 15 minutes unmasked and less than 6 feet from others (i.e. 6 feet is not feasible), then the other individuals are considered close contacts and will need to follow the quarantine protocol.

5. Should school aged children refrain from participating in sports until after Day 10 of isolation and quarantine? (Last updated 12/30/21)

Individuals can participate in sports as long as they can adhere to strict mask usage on days 6-10, including during play. If strict mask use is not possible, participating in sports should be delayed until after day 10 of isolation or quarantine.

Schools and families should be aware that team sports or other extracurricular activities, especially indoor activities involving shouting or singing, increase the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.

6. Is a person considered to be infectious on days 6-10 of the isolation period? Should their close contacts at day 6-10 be identified and quarantined? (Last updated 12/30/21)

Based on information provided by the CDC, yes, a person is considered to be infectious on days 6-10 of the isolation period. Strict mask use is intended to minimize the risk present on days 6-10. According to the CDC, the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs *early* in the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after.

An individual identified as a close contact of a person in days 6-10 of the isolation period would ideally be identified and quarantined. However, given an expected surge in cases, the ability for contact tracers to keep up with the number of investigations is expected to be exceeded. Given that transmission risk is highest earlier in the course of illness, contact tracing should not focus on those individuals who had contact with a person on days 6-10 of the isolation period. VDH currently recommends that individuals that come into contact with someone under isolation on days 6-10 NOT be considered a close contact, as long as both the case and the person being exposed consistently and correctly wore masks. VDH recognizes that transmission is still possible on days 6-10, especially without proper mask use, but must balance the ability to perform contact tracing with the exposures that are highest risk.

7. If a child who has recently tested positive for COVID-19 is exposed again, does the child need to quarantine or be re-tested? (Last updated 12/30/21)

CDC currently does not provide clear guidance on the quarantine recommendations for unvaccinated individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days. CDC is expected to continue to update its guidance and provide more clarity on this topic.

Previous VDH guidance stated that unvaccinated children who had tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days and were exposed again did not need to quarantine, as long as they continued to mask, and isolated immediately if symptoms developed. Early data indicates that prior infection with COVID-19 may not provide immunity against the Omicron variant, therefore it is unclear if the 90 day exemption from quarantine is still applicable for unvaccinated individuals. However, in the absence of updated guidance from CDC, the previous VDH guidance may be applied. Fully vaccinated (and boosted, if recommended) students and staff are exempt from quarantine, but should wear a mask for 10 days and get tested on day 5, if possible. VDH is making this interim recommendation balancing disruptions to in-person learning with the risk of transmission.

8. Will unvaccinated students or staff who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms be required to show a negative COVID-19 test to return to school or work? (Last updated 12/30/21)

CDC and VDH do not recommend requiring a negative COVID-19 test in order for unvaccinated students or staff to return to school. All individuals, regardless of vaccination status, with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should stay home and physically distance from others for *at least 5 days followed by strict mask use for an additional 5 days*. Individuals who have a fever should continue to stay home until their fever has resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine and other symptoms have improved. Individuals who are unable to mask, should isolate at home for the additional 5 days (for a total of 10 days.)

9. Have the mask recommendations changed? What are ways to improve mask fit? (Last updated 12/30/21)

Mask recommendations have not changed. There are a number of strategies that can be utilized to improve mask fit.

Make your mask fit and work better

- Use a mask that fits snugly over your nose, mouth, and chin without gaps
 - Choose a mask with a nose wire
 - Use a mask fitter or brace
- Add a layer of material
 - Use a cloth mask with two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric
 - Wear a disposable mask under a cloth mask
- Knot and tuck ear loops of a 3-ply mask

Choose the right mask

- Do not use a mask made of non-breathable materials (plastic, leather, etc.) or mesh
- Do not combine two disposable masks
- Do not combine a KN95 with any other mask

Good to know

- Masks are not a substitute for physical distancing
- Masks protect the person wearing the mask as well as others
- Face shields, a scarf or cold weather headwear are not a substitute for a mask
- Masks with one-way valves or vents are not recommended
- After use, throw away disposable masks and launder cloth masks

10. Is Test to Stay still going to be an option to allow students to stay in school with serial testing, rather than quarantine for 5 days at home? (Last updated 12/30/21)

VDH is working quickly to incorporate the new CDC isolation and quarantine guidance into the Test to Stay protocol, and is discussing the feasibility and benefits of proceeding with this plan. More information will be forthcoming.

11. If a student or staff member has an ongoing exposure to a household member with COVID-19, how does this impact the isolation and quarantine recommendations? (Last updated 12/30/21)

The student or staff member would be considered a close contact of the household member with COVID-19. In the absence of updated CDC guidance on this topic, they would need to quarantine at home until the household member is no longer considered contagious (day 10), and then begin their 5 day quarantine period after their last exposure to the contagious individual. Testing is recommended on day 5 of the close contact's quarantine.