

# COVID-19 Contact Tracing Guide and FAQ for K-12 Schools

## What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Fever ( $\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) or chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Muscle or body aches
- New loss of taste or smell
- Cough (new, changed, or worsening)
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Sore throat

## What do I do if someone has COVID-19-like symptoms?

Follow the decision tree 1 for "[What to do if a Person is Symptomatic at School.](#)"

## What defines a COVID-19 case?

A COVID-19 *case* is a person who tests positive with a molecular or antigen COVID-19 test.

## When can someone who tests positive for COVID-19 return to school?

Anyone who has a positive molecular or antigen test for COVID-19 should stay home and away from others except to get medical care. This is called isolation or the case's *isolation period*. In most circumstances, the individual who tested positive can end their isolation, return to school, and resume normal activities when all of the following criteria are met:

- 10 days have passed since the individual first showed any symptoms of COVID-19 or 10 days have passed since the individual was tested for COVID-19 if they never had any symptoms, AND
- No fever within the last 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications), AND
- Symptoms have significantly improved

## How do I know when someone who tests positive for COVID-19 was contagious?

This may also be referred to as when a COVID-19 case was infectious. The period of time during which a COVID-19 case might transmit the virus, or expose others to the virus, is called their *contagious period*.

- If the individual who tested positive has symptoms, they are considered contagious 2 days before their first symptoms began and lasts until the end of their isolation period.
- If the individual who tested positive does not have symptoms, they are considered contagious 2 days before the day their test sample was collected and lasts until the end of their isolation period.

The example calendar below demonstrates the contagious period, isolation period, and when a COVID-19 case may return to school (if all three criteria to end isolation are met on day 10).

September 2021						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Aug 29	30	31	Sep 1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	SYMPTOM ONSET	CASE CONTAGIOUS PERIOD		CASE ISOLATION PERIOD		
12	13	14	15	16	17 RETURN TO SCHOOL	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	Oct 1	2

### What is contact tracing?

- Letting people know they may have been *exposed* to COVID-19 (that they are *close contacts*) and should monitor their health for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Helping people who may have been *exposed* to COVID-19 get tested.
- Asking people to self-quarantine or participate in Test to Stay with modified quarantine if they are identified as a close contact.

### How do I identify who is a close contact?

Use the "[COVID-19 Contact Tracing Checklist for K-12 Schools](#)" as a guide to identify close contacts in schools. For additional information, also see the "Identifying Close Contacts in the School Setting" section of the DOH [K-12 Supplemental Considerations](#) document.

### More information about close contacts in schools:

While physical distancing seeks to limit exposure and transmission, the definition of a *close contact* is distinct from physical distancing requirements in schools or in other settings. CDC defines a close contact based on proximity and duration of exposure.

- In most settings, for COVID-19, a close contact is anyone who was within 6 feet of an infectious person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes). An infectious person can spread COVID-19 starting from 2 days before they have any symptoms or, if they are asymptomatic, 2 days before their sample that tested positive was collected.
- In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, or a structured outdoor setting (e.g., holding class outdoors with educator supervision), where masks are worn correctly and consistently, the close contact definition excludes students who were between 3 to 6 feet of an infectious student if both the infectious student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.
  - This exception **does not apply** to teachers, staff, or other adults in the classroom setting. This exception also **does not apply** in other settings like extracurricular activities, when eating meals, traveling on the bus, or at child care.

## **Which close contacts need to stay home from school and for how long? What other precautions should they follow?**

Follow the decision tree 2 for how to "[Identify and Care for Close Contacts at School.](#)"

### **What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?**

- Isolation separates people who are *sick* with a contagious disease like COVID-19 from people who are not sick.
- Quarantine separates people who were *exposed* to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. Quarantine can be longer than isolation because it takes people a few days to develop the infection. There are three options for quarantine outlined below. Consult with your local health department to choose the best option(s) for your school or district.
- Isolation and quarantine both work to slow the spread of COVID-19 by preventing further transmission of the virus by people who are sick or who have been exposed and may become sick.

### **More information about quarantine for people who are close contacts:**

**Asymptomatic close contacts who are fully vaccinated or tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days and recovered do not need to quarantine and can remain in school and participate in other activities.**

- They should be tested for COVID-19 5-7 days after they were last around the case during the case's contagious period.
  - Close contacts who had COVID-19 in the past three months should be tested using an antigen test.
- They should wear a mask in all public indoor areas for 14 days or until they receive a negative test for COVID-19.
- They should continue to watch for symptoms through 14 days and get evaluated by a health care provider if symptoms develop.

**All other close contacts (i.e., those who are NOT fully vaccinated or have NOT tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days and recovered) should quarantine fully at home for at least 7 days unless they participate in Test to Stay with modified quarantine (see below).**

- They should be tested for COVID-19 immediately and 5-7 days after they were last around the case during the case's contagious period.
- They should follow the recommended quarantine protocol and stay home for 7 days after their exposure. They should not attend any school-associated activities, child care, or other community activities during their quarantine period.
- After 7 days, they may resume all activities if they have tested negative no sooner than day 5 after exposure and have had no symptoms of COVID-19.
- They should continue to wear a mask in all public indoor settings and watch for symptoms through day 14. If symptoms develop, they should isolate and get evaluated by a health care provider.

**Close contacts who are eligible for the [Test to Stay Program](#) with modified quarantine can continue attending classes but should otherwise stay home for 7 days after their exposure.** This means they cannot participate in school-associated activities, child care, or other community activities during this time. This is a *modified quarantine*. See the [K-12 Supplemental Considerations](#) document for more information.

- After 7 days, these students may resume all activities if they have tested negative at least twice during the 7 days, have had no symptoms of COVID-19, and have not attended any school-associated activities, child care, or other community activities during their modified quarantine period.
- They should continue to wear a mask in all indoor public settings and watch for symptoms through day 14. If symptoms develop, they should isolate and get evaluated by a health care provider.

**Students and staff who choose not to test or do not get tested will need to quarantine for either 10 or 14 days.** Please see the “Quarantine” section of the DOH [K-12 Requirements](#) document for more information.

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

### Additional COVID-19 K-12 Resources

See the full Case Investigation and Contact Tracing Toolkit for schools on the DOH [COVID-19 Resources and Recommendations](#) page. Here you will also find the DOH [K-12 Requirements for 2021-2022](#) and [Supplemental Considerations to Mitigate COVID-19 Transmission in Schools](#).

### General COVID-19 Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee’s proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person’s race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share only accurate information to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Jurisdiction](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions?** Call our COVID-19 Information hotline: **1-800-525-0127**

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and [observed state holidays](#), 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about

your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).