# Return to School Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 9/15/2020

## What happens when a staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

When anyone in ND tests positive for COVID-19, it should be reported to the NDDoH.  That individual will be contacted and notified that they need to isolate for 10 days at home and be interviewed to understand symptoms and to identify close contacts.  Close contacts will be notified and instructed to quarantine for 14 days.

[What happens when a staff members tests positive for COVID-19?](#)

## What is the definition of a close contact?

A close contact is somebody who is within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more cumulatively.

[Definition of a Close Contact](#)

## What if a support staff member tests positive for COVID-19?  This could include staff who float around the building and serve multiple students in multiple grades and classrooms.

This may impact multiple classrooms and multiple children throughout a school.  As much as possible schools shouldn't have staff float throughout the building but instead have children move to their location, if possible, or stay with the same cohort of students.  This will minimize the number of exposures.

[What happens when a support staff member tests positive for COVID-19?](#)

## What is the pod recommendation from the NDDoH?

As much as possible, students should be kept in smaller groups.  Cohorts or pods are recommended for schools because it will reduce the number of close contacts.

[Definition of Pods/Cohorts](#)

## What happens if a student tests positive for COVID-19?

A positive COVID-19 test on a student will be reported to the NDDoH and the case will be investigated to determine close contacts.  The NDDoH will follow up with the school to help determine this.  The student will isolate at home for 10 days and close contacts will quarantine at home for 14 days.

[What happens when a student tests positive for COVID-19?](#)

## What is the difference between the 14 day quarantine and the 10 day isolation period?

Positive cases of COVID-19 need to isolate at home for 10 days because that is the length of time that an individual is contagious and can pass on the virus.  Close contacts of positive cases need to quarantine at home for 14 days because that is the incubation period or the length time it takes for an individual to test positive or contract the virus.

[What is the difference between a 14 day quarantine and a 10 day isolation period?](#)

## What happens when a parent or sibling test positive for COVID-19?

Because household contacts are continuously exposed, household contacts will have to stay home for the case's 10 day isolation period plus their 14 day quarantine period because there is the potential that the contact could still be exposed on day 10 of

the case's isolation period and still have 14 days where they could potentially test positive for COVID-19.

What happens when a parent or sibling test positive for COVID-19?

## Should close contacts be tested for COVID-19?

It is recommended that all close contacts be tested 7-10 days after an exposure.  If you are tested before that 7-10 day period you may be a false negative.

Should close contacts be tested for COVID-19?

## Does a close contact of a close contact need to quarantine?

A close contact of a close contact does not need to quarantine.

Does a close contact of a close contact need to quarantine?

## Does a mask policy change the need for quarantine?

Masks have been shown to decrease transmission of COVID-19 by 33% so they will have an impact on the number of cases.  Because this percentage isn't 100%, even if masks are being worn, close contacts are still recommended to quarantine for 14 days following an exposure.

Does a mask policy change the need for quarantine?

## If someone who is quarantined tests negative for COVID-19, can they return to school before the 14 day quarantine period is complete?

All close contacts are recommended to be tested for COVID-19 7-10 days after exposure.  Even if an individual tests negative at this time, he or she still needs to complete the 14 day quarantine because it can take up to 14 days to be positive.

If somebody who is quarantined tests negative, do they
need to complete the 14 day quarantine?

## If you are asymptomatic and not a close contact and choose to be tested for COVID-19, do you have to quarantine until you receive results?

You do not need to quarantine pending results of a COVID-19 test as long as you have no symptoms and you have not been identified as a close contact of somebody who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Do you need to quarantine if asymptomatic and awaiting
results of a COVID test?

## If you are quarantined due to an exposure outside of school, do you need to quarantine from school, too?

If an individual is identified as a close contact of somebody who tested positive for COVID-19 and is advised to quarantine, that means they need to quarantine at home and can only be around people who are immediate household members regardless of where the exposure occurred.

Do you need to quarantine from school is exposure
occurred outside of school?

## Are there activities that schools should consider not participating in this school year?

Any activities where the 6 foot social distancing cannot be maintained are riskier for COVID-19 and are recommended to avoid.  For example, it may be better for children to eat in their classrooms than in a cafeteria.

Any high touch items that cannot be cleaned between uses (i.e. manipulatives or school supplies) should be divided among students so they all have their own.  The goal is to minimize a high number of people having contact with the same surfaces.

## What considerations need to be made for band and choir?

Ideally you want to mask when students are not singing or playing an instrument and keep students distanced 6 feet from each other.  Try to do as much outside as possible in the spring and fall when the weather is favorable.  It would be better to keep the same cohort of students together for these classes, as well.

## What considerations need to be made in the secondary school setting?

Consider rotating the teachers instead of the students to decrease the number of close contacts.  Assigned seating will be helpful so it is easier to identify close contacts.  Teachers in the secondary setting should ideally maintain 6 foot social distancing as much as possible.  Cohort students as much as possible and avoid congregating of students in an area such as near lockers.  Consider having students only going in one direction down hallways.

## How do we distinguish between COVID-19 and other common illnesses that occur in the school setting?  How do we decide who needs to be referred home or to the doctor?

COVID-19 looks like many other respiratory illnesses and symptoms may include fever (generally 100.4 or higher), sore throat, runny nose, congestion, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of taste and smell.  It will be difficult to determine if an illness is

COVID-19 or something else.  The CDC is recommending that schools follow their general infectious disease exclusion guidelines.  They are not recommending that schools formally screen students as they enter the building such as fever checks.  It is recommended that parents screen their children at home and keep them home if they have any of the above symptoms.

[How do school staff determine who needs to be referred home?](#)

## When can students return to school after symptoms are present?
*UPDATED 8/22/20*

~~The CDC recommends that schools follow the general illness exclusion guidance they have followed in past years. Students may return to school if it has been 24 hours since their symptoms have subsided and fever free without the use of medication.  If a child is not improving, it is recommended they see their primary care physician to determine further steps such as a COVID-19 test.~~  *The CDC and NDDoH changed the return to school guidance on 8/22/20.  It is now recommended that students and staff do not return to school until: they receive a negative COVID-19 test, or a provider has diagnosed them with a condition that does not require exclusion, or they have stayed home for 10 days from onset of symptoms and have been fever free for 24 hours and there is an improvement of symptoms.*

[When can student return to school after having symptoms of COVID-19?](#)

## If a student is referred home due to respiratory symptoms, do they need to stay home from sports practice and after school activities until they meet the recommended requirements (negative COVID, diagnosis from provider of non-excludable condition, or 10 days at home) just as they need to stay home from school?

Yes. They need to stay home from all activities until a negative test, 10 day isolation, or other diagnosis.

## Should children be vaccinated against influenza this year?

It is more important than ever that children be vaccinated against influenza this year because if they have a cough or congestion, even mild, they will be excluded from school. These symptoms could be caused by influenza and not COVID-19 so eliminating your child's chances of contracting influenza is best so they can stay in school.

Should we receive the influenza vaccination this year?

## Where do I find my school district's return to school plan?

School districts will post their plans on their individual websites.

Where do I find my schools return to school policy?

## If my child misses multiple days this school year due to symptoms or quarantine, will he or she need to repeat a grade or extend their school year?

If a child is quarantined but still healthy enough to participate in school, each school district is supposed to have a plan in place to provide education through a distance learning format. Everyone will have an opportunity to learn even if they are excluded from school so parents do not need to be concerned that their child will need to repeat a grade or extend their school year due to quarantine or isolation.

What happens when my child misses multiple days of school due to quarantine?

## What considerations do families need to make for this school year?

Even if a school is perfect about social distancing and requires masks, there will still be COVID-19 cases in a school and families need to be prepared for interruptions to face to face learning. Families need to continue socially distancing and being mindful of activities after school and on the weekends to decrease the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Families also need to have a backup plan to prepare for quarantine or

isolation.  This backup plan should not include grandparents or others that are at higher risk for having serious complications from COVID-19.

Family Considerations

## What will sports and extracurricular activities look like this school year?

The goal is to reduce the number of close contacts so as much as possible participants should maintain 6 foot social distancing and wearing masks when not playing.  Events should not include large gatherings and should follow the ND Smart Restart Guidelines meaning there won't be as many people able to watch events live. It is encouraged that these events be televised or streamed via the internet.  Teams need to prepare for the fact that if one member of the team tests positive for COVID-19 it is likely that the entire team will be considered close contacts and need to quarantine for 14 days which will mean missing practice and events.

Sports and Activities Considerations

## What are the recommendations for bussing this school year?

All people on a bus should wear masks.  Assigned seating would be helpful in determining close contacts.  If possible, passengers should be spaced out 6feet apart.

Bussing Recommendations

## Should I continue with well visits and immunizations during this pandemic?

This fall, more than ever, it is important to maintain the health of you and your child. This will prevent exclusion from school due to illness and could prevent future additional visits to the doctor for illness.  Parents are recommended to take their children to well child visits to make sure student is healthy and meeting developmental milestones.  It is very important that children continue taking

controller medications to maintain their health.  All immunizations are still required for school as listed on the NDDoH website and record of these immunizations or proper exemption paperwork must be submitted to the school prior to their first day of school.  Children will be excluded from school if they haven't submitted this paperwork by October 1.

[Well Visits and School Required Vaccination Recommendations](#)

## Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?

There are some COVID-19 vaccines that are moving into Phase 3 clinical trials and it is possible we could have a vaccine by the end of 2020 or early 2021.  It is unclear who will be recommended to receive that vaccine or how many doses will be required.

[COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

## What is the latest data on surface transmission and how long COVID lives on surfaces?  What considerations do schools need to make in cleaning high touch surfaces?

CDC Resources specifically for schools: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html

CDC Resource: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf

## Is frequent hand sanitizing, handwashing, and cleaning of surfaces good long term?  Are we at risk for creating superbugs?  Are we destroying the good bacteria on our skin?

These questions are difficult to pin-point an exact answer, but what I can tell you, is that there is no indication at this point, that increased/frequent hand washing, or hand sanitizing is going to create a super bug.

The increased risk and potential complications caused by COVID-19 are dangerous. So while we may be destroying some good bacteria, the reduction in risk of COVID is the goal.

Here are a few resources related to hand sanitizing and washing:

https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html
https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/safely-using-hand-sanitizer
https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html

## If a household contact is symptomatic and waiting on COVID-19 test results, does the rest of the household need to quarantine until those results are known even if they are not having symptoms?

Based on recommendations currently – family members of a symptomatic individual waiting results are _encouraged_ to stay home – but are not required. SO – if a teacher has a child in their home, and that child is symptomatic – it would ultimately be up to the school on if that teacher should stay home, but it would be our recommendation that all household members stay home until results are received.

## If somebody has a "false positive" and later tests negative for COVID-19, can they come out of isolation sooner than their 10 days?  Can their close contacts come out of quarantine sooner than their 14 days?

The positive case sticks. A negative test result doesn't matter after a positive test result because you can't test out of isolation. That individual would need to isolate their full 10 days for a positive test and close contacts would need to finish the quarantine for the full 14 days.