



Bell County Public Health District
PROMOTE • PREVENT • PROTECT

Public Health Guidance for Prevention and Response to COVID-19 in Schools

*Guidelines are subject to change based on guidance from the
CDC and State entities

Introduction

Bell County Public Health District (BCHD) intends this Reference Guide to be a helpful tool for local education leaders across Bell County for response to suspected, presumed, or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in their schools.

Note: This document does not outline all detailed public health guidance for K-12 schools - for all public health guidance as directed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), see [*Strong Start 2020-21 Guidebook for Public Health Operations*](#) and [*SY 20-21 Public Health Planning Guidance*](#). For updated information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), please see [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC](#). Most of the content of this document is based on CDC guidance and may differ from TEA guidance. It is at the discretion of school administrations to decide how to proceed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with public health.

This Screening Reference Guide outlines recommended protocols for staff to follow when responding to a positive symptom screening or report of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection. These protocols identify next steps in interacting with students or staff who have screened positive, meaning they:

- a. Share they were exposed to someone with COVID-19 (defined as having close contact of less than 6 feet distance for more than 15 minutes) but have no symptoms.
- b. Share they were diagnosed with COVID-19 less than 10 days ago but are not currently symptomatic: OR
- c. Present with at least one of the following COVID-19 symptoms, with and without laboratory-confirmation of infection:
 - i. Fever ($\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$)
 - ii. Sore throat
 - iii. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - iv. New cough
 - v. New loss of taste or smell*
 - vi. Diarrhea, vomiting, or abdominal pain
 - vii. New onset of headache

The following staff should adhere to protocols outlined in this Screening Reference Guide:

- All school staff who interact with students, to know what to do if students share, they had an exposure or diagnosis of COVID-19, or develop COVID-19 symptoms during the day
- School nurses or delegated staff
- School staff who are responsible for cleaning, notification to WCCHD, and/or communication to students, families, teachers, and staff, according to the protocols outlined in this guide.

Definitions

Close Contacts:

- Individuals within six feet of someone who is showing symptoms of COVID-19, or has tested positive for COVID-19, for at least 15 minutes, when neither person is wearing a mask
- Individuals who are masked and the COVID-19 infected individual has no symptoms, but the parties were in sustained physical contact (hand holding, hugging, huddling etc.)
- Individuals are masked or separated by a barrier (Plexiglas or some other barrier) and the COVID-19 infected individual has at least 2 COVID-19 symptoms
- If both individuals are masked or separated by a barrier (Plexiglas or some other barrier) and the COVID-19 infected individual has no symptoms, there was no physical contact and the time-period within 6 ft was 30 consecutive minutes or less then this may not be considered an exposure.
- **Exception:** In the **K–12 indoor classroom** setting, the close contact definition **excludes students** who were within **3 to 6 feet of an infected student** (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where
 - both students were engaged in **consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks; and**
 - other **K–12 school prevention strategies** (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the **K–12 school setting**. This exception **does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting**.

Isolation: Separation of persons who have a contagious disease to help prevent spread of the disease.

Quarantine: Separation of persons who have been exposed to, but not diagnosed with, a contagious disease for a period to see if they develop symptoms or a positive test.

Fully Vaccinated: Refers to a person who is at least 2 weeks past the 2nd injection of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccines for COVID-19, or 2 weeks past the 1st injection of the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

Confirmed COVID-19 Case: A case that was diagnosed using a molecular test, e.g., PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) or through genomic sequencing.

Probable COVID-19 Case:

- 1) A case that was diagnosed using a rapid antigen test, administered in a health care facility, pharmacy, school, or drive through testing site (not a home test).
- 2) a case that was diagnosed by a medical practitioner using clinical symptoms and an epidemiologic association with a confirmed case.

* For Epidemiologic purposes, Confirmed and Probable Cases are reported separately; however, in terms of mitigation of spread and infection control, both Confirmed and Probable Cases are considered potentially contagious, and are subject to isolation and quarantine protocols.

School Closure Threshold Guidance

Consideration to close a school facility would take place if 5% or greater of the total in-person population (students and staff) have Confirmed COVID-19, through PCR testing or genomic sequencing (see definitions). In addition, if the number of probable cases is also high, this must be taken into consideration as it is also an indication of spread. If a classroom, campus, or other facility approaches this 5% threshold, a review and discussion between school administration and the health district would occur. Multiple factors, to include but not limited to, the number of probable cases (see definitions) in the facility, the overall population of the campus, cohorting or self-containment of students or staff members, and the epidemiology of the case(s) all need to be considered prior to recommending a closure.

If the number of Probable cases plus Confirmed cases reaches 10%, closure should occur. Closure of a single classroom, a portion of a facility, or entire building may need to occur prior to reaching a 5% threshold, depending on the number of persons potentially exposed in that setting.

Additional factors to consider in deciding to close a school are the level of community transmission and the percent of the population that are vaccinated.

Students or staff with Confirmed and Probable Cases of COVID-19 must be removed until they meet the criteria of a recovery per [TEA guidelines](#).

In the event of a school closure, it shall be for a period of up to 5 calendar days. If spread within the campus is found, closure time may need be extended to 10-14 days to prevent further transmission.

During this time:

- 1) During this time the Bell County Public Health District will be responsible for contact tracing.
- 2) During this time school officials will be responsible for fully sanitizing the campus before allowing students and staff to return to the campus.
- 3) During this time the Bell County Public Health District, the Bell County Public Health Authority, and the school will cooperate and collaborate on both these efforts.

General Guidelines for Individuals Confirmed or Suspected with COVID-19

Any individuals who themselves either: (a) are lab-confirmed to have COVID-19; or (b) experience the symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) must stay at home throughout the infection period and cannot return to campus until the school system screens the individual to determine they have met the criteria for return, detailed below.

A. Confirmed Diagnosis of COVID-19

Staff or Student shares they were diagnosed with COVID-19 within past 10 days

- Do not allow person to enter school facility.
- If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately.
- If asymptomatic, person may return to school 10 days after the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test. If symptomatic, person may return to campus when all three of the following criteria are met:
 1. At least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
 2. At least one day (24 hours) has passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications).
 3. The individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).
- Student may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out.
- Individuals excluded from school for diagnosis without symptoms must continue to self-screen for symptoms and report daily according to district policies and procedures.
- Students may not utilize group transportation such as the bus until released to return to the school facility

Notifications

- School must notify BCPHD of laboratory-diagnosed COVID-19 case(s) (both Confirmed and Probable) among students or staff (as required by Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81).
- School should follow the directions shared by BCPHD for this instance, such as for contact tracing students, staff, and families, and/or specific cleaning protocols.

Closure

- Close off areas used by the sick person, do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- Consult with BCPHD as to whether closure of a classroom or entire building is recommended. There may be no need to close the school if BCPHD determines that close contacts are excluded and there is sufficient space to continue normal operations.
- BCPHD may in some situations determine that closure of a facility is to be considered. In conjunction with the TEA, the Local Health Authority may recommend school closure. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Communication with students, families, and staff

- Schools are recommended to notify in writing all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-confirmed case is identified.
 - o If needed, a template letter can be provided by BCPHD.

- The notice to staff and families must maintain confidentiality in accordance with Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81 and all other state and federal laws.
- A public health professional will contact staff and families if they are identified as a close contact to the individual who tested positive.

B. Suspected Diagnosis of COVID-19: Symptoms Only

Staff or Student presents with at least one of the following COVID-19 symptoms (*Fever • Sore throat • Shortness of breath • Difficulty breathing • New cough • New loss of taste or smell • Diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain • New headache*)

- Do not allow person to enter school facility.
- If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately.
- Person must stay home and may seek medical care.
- In the case of an individual who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, such individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.
- If the individual has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either
 - Obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis or
 - Obtain an acute infection test (PCR) at an approved testing location (<https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/>) that comes back negative for COVID-19.
*Antibody tests and rapid antigen tests are NOT used to confirm positive or negative status.
- Students may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out.

C. Unvaccinated Individuals Exposed to COVID-19, Asymptomatic

Student or staff who had close contact with a known case of COVID-19 in preceding 14 days, and who is not Fully Vaccinated:

- Do not allow person to enter school facility
- If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately
- Person may return to /work 10 days after last close contact, if no symptoms develop or they do not have a positive COVID-19 test
- If symptoms develop consistent with COVID-19 and/or the person has a positive laboratory test result during the period of quarantine, then they must be excluded from school according to the rules for an active case, using the date of symptom onset or positive case, whichever comes first.
- ***Exposed persons who have been Fully Vaccinated do not need to Quarantine. Due to the Delta variant, it is strongly recommended that they wear a mask during the**

10-day observation period.

- *Persons who had a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 in the preceding 3 months may not have to quarantine. Consult with health district.
- Students may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out

Alternate Actions - Unvaccinated Staff Exposed to COVID-19, Asymptomatic

Assess if High Risk Exposure-

- Infected or exposed person not wearing a mask
- Infected person symptomatic
- < 6 ft apart for > 15 min cumulative
- Household contact

If the exposure was not considered high risk as noted above, staff member may continue to work, self-monitor for symptoms for 10 d, and be tested every other day through Day 10. They must **wear a mask and keep 6 ft from others**. If develop symptoms or test positive, must leave work ASAP.

* For household contacts, it is highly recommended they stay home for at least 10 days.

Additional Actions for When a Positive Case Has Been Detected on Campus:

Closure

- Close off areas used by the sick person, do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- Consult with BCPHD as to whether closure of a classroom or entire building is recommended. There may be no need to close the school if BCPHD determines that close contacts are excluded and there is sufficient space to continue normal operations.
- BCPHD may in some situations determine that closure of a facility is to be considered. In conjunction with the TEA, the Local Health Authority may recommend school closure. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Cleaning

- If seven (7) days or less since the individual with the positive case was on campus, close off areas used by the person, including school transportation vehicles, and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- Wait at least 24 hours after the last presence of the person at the facility before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- People should not be in the classroom, room, or other area of the facility while it is being cleaned.
- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.

- Use an EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Remember to clean items that might not ordinarily be cleaned daily such as doorknobs, light switches, countertops, chairs, cubbies, and playground structures.
- Follow CDC Guidance for Disinfecting Schools for additional cleaning and disinfection recommendations.
- For school transportation vehicles:
 - Do not use the vehicle until after cleaning and disinfection.
 - Wait at least 24 hours after the last presence of the person in the vehicle before cleaning and disinfecting (or if 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible).
- School must follow any other directions shared by BCPHD for this instance.