

## Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

First Issued: 8/26/2020

Revised: 1/11/2022 (See Change Log/Appendix F)

**SUBJECT:** Investigation of COVID-19 Cases in Pre-K-12 Schools

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
Division of Disease Surveillance

### I. PURPOSE

This SOP provides a framework for responding to COVID-19 cases among students, teachers, or staff within a school. The guidance in this SOP is not exhaustive, nor does it replace a school's strategic plan for COVID-19, or direct engagement with the Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE) or Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC). The primary goal of this document is to enable students and staff to remain in the school classroom through vaccination, pooled testing, isolation/quarantine, and masking.

### II. ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE

#### Case Definitions

Maine CDC is following case definitions for COVID-19 as established by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. The current case definitions can be found [here](#). These case definitions are subject to change.

#### School Responsibilities

A designated school staff member affiliated with the school where a case of COVID-19 is identified will be the primary point of contact and serve as an essential part of any epidemiological investigation. The designee should contact other applicable designated school administrators, school health advisors/school physicians, as needed.

The designated school staff member shall serve as the primary point of contact for families of confirmed cases. The designee should:

- Communicate with the family of a COVID-19 case and share guidance on [isolation and quarantine](#) for the COVID-19 case and for family members living in the same household;
- Provide an anticipated release from isolation date;
- Make social service referrals with the family's permission to [covidsocialsupport@maine.gov](mailto:covidsocialsupport@maine.gov);
- Recommend that the parent/guardian monitor other family members for [symptoms](#) of COVID-19;
- Advise families to alert their health care provider of the positive COVID-19 test, especially if symptoms worsen; and
- Advise close contacts to seek a COVID-19 test 5 days following exposure.

#### Laboratory Testing

Maine CDC recommends testing close contacts of COVID-19 cases. Asymptomatic close

contacts should test on day 5 following exposure. Symptomatic close contacts should test as soon as possible.

Individuals identified as close contacts should follow the U.S. CDC's [guidance on quarantine](#). Testing of close contacts also helps identify additional cases and helps identify further close contacts who should quarantine. PCR confirmation of a positive antigen test is not required if the antigen test is conducted on an individual with a known exposure to a positive case or linked positive PCR pooled test. Pooled testing participants do not need additional testing beyond the pooled and follow-up testing if identified as close contacts, provided they remain asymptomatic.

In general, individuals who test positive should not be retested for 90 days following the date of the positive test result. However, an individual who develops new onset of symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection during the 90-day period following the initial positive test collection date should be retested and should isolate until 24 hours after symptoms have resolved although there will not be contact tracing. An individual who tests positive again 90 days after the last positive test must complete isolation following the new, positive result.

### **At-Home Test Results**

With increasing availability of at-home COVID-19 tests, schools may choose to accept the results from such tests. Please note that Maine CDC does not investigate or accept reports of positive results from at-home tests or count such positive results as cases.

Maine CDC recommends that schools that choose to accept home-based test results do so when the school is able to verify the collection date and patient. Having this information will help determine the start and end dates of isolation and quarantine, if indicated.

### **School-Based Pooled Testing**

Maine CDC and Maine Department of Education (DOE) have implemented a pooled PCR testing program, available to public and private schools (private pre-K-only programs are not eligible to apply). Pooled testing involves mixing several test samples together in a “batch” or “pool” and then testing the pooled sample with a PCR test for detection of SARS-CoV-2. Students who participate in this pooled testing program can avoid quarantine if exposed to COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status.

In December 2021, the U.S. CDC issued [guidance](#) on a “Test to Stay strategy” for students exposed to COVID-19. Test to Stay is a practice comprising contact tracing and serial testing to allow school-associated close contacts who are not fully vaccinated to continue in-person learning and avoid quarantine. Maine’s “Test to Stay” program is the pooled testing program. Maine CDC recognizes that schools may opt for an alternative Test to Stay strategy via daily antigen testing as another approach to minimize quarantine.

### **Isolation**

- Isolation is the process of separating individuals who are infected with COVID-19 from others.
- All students, teachers, or staff who test positive for COVID-19 shall isolate until they meet the [U.S. CDC criteria for release from isolation](#), regardless of vaccination status. See Appendix G.
- If a student, teacher, or staff has access to a test and wants to test during isolation, the best

approach is to use an [antigen test](#) toward the end of the 5-day isolation period. Follow [U.S. CDC guidance for details on testing](#). If the test result is positive, continue to isolate until day 10. If the test result is negative, isolation can end (on or after day 6), and the student, teacher or staff can return to school.

- When returning to school after isolation, wearing a well-fitting [mask for an additional five days](#) (until day 10) is required at all times when around others indoors, except when eating or drinking.
  - The school should ensure there is a plan for people ending isolation and undergoing their 5 additional days after the end of isolation to stay masked at all times.
  - During times in the school day when students or staff members may typically remove masks indoors (such as during lunches, snacks, etc.), schools should 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).

### **Contact Tracing and Quarantine**

- Contact tracing is the process of identifying and notifying individuals (or their families) who have had close contact with someone infected with COVID-19. Quarantine is the process of separating and restricting the movement of persons who were in close contact with someone who tested positive or had symptoms of COVID-19. *See Appendix H.*
- Maine CDC recommends that schools conduct contact tracing unless the school consistently observes and enforces a universal masking policy (*see Section V*) for all teachers, students, staff, and visitors. Schools that are not conducting contact tracing may continue to notify parents and families of in-school exposures, where such close contact identification is possible.
- Schools that do not observe and enforce a universal masking policy should continue to conduct contact tracing. After isolating a positive case, the school-designated contact tracer should identify and notify all close contacts (*see Appendices*).
- For schools that are conducting contact tracing:
  - Maine DOE will work with school officials to provide technical assistance to identify close contacts within schools, if needed. In a school setting where there is no assigned seating the whole classroom will be counted as close contacts. Where a school strictly adheres to assigned seating, close contacts will be identified using the definition in the glossary (*see Section V*).
  - Close contacts must quarantine at home from all activities outside the home, including school and school activities, for 5 days from last COVID-19 exposure, and then must wear a well-fitting mask at all times when around other indoors, except while eating or drinking, for an additional 5 days.
  - The school should ensure that there is a plan for people identified as close contacts and people returning to school after quarantine to stay masked at all times (except while eating

and drinking) as outlined in U.S. CDC guidelines.

- During times in the school day when students, teachers, or staff members may typically remove masks indoors (such as during lunches, snacks, etc.), schools should 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).
- Exposures that occur in outdoor settings or on a school bus do not constitute a close contact and, thus, do not require quarantine, regardless of vaccination status. This applies even where there is physical contact in outdoor settings (*e.g.*, during sporting events).
- Designated school staff, along with other school officials, should make initial contact with close contacts to ensure they begin their quarantine period in a timely manner. If close contacts need to quarantine from school, and are identified while school is in session, they may complete the day and must be masked. If private transport is unavailable, taking the bus home is acceptable.
- Those close contacts who are enrolled in the pooled testing program may continue to attend school and school activities so long as they remain asymptomatic. They should be informed of their need to quarantine in the community, unless they meet other quarantine exceptions, outlined below, and the need to monitor for symptoms.

### **Quarantine Exceptions**

Schools that are conducting contact tracing should continue to place students/faculty/staff who are close contacts into quarantine. However, if at least one of the following conditions applies, students/staff can be exempt from quarantine:

1. The close contact is 18 or older and has received [all recommended vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people; **or**
2. The close contact is 5-17 years and completed the [primary series](#) of COVID-19 vaccines; **or**
3. The close contact had COVID-19 within the last 90 days; **or**
4. The close contact (staff or student) participates in school pooled testing; **or**
5. The school consistently observes and enforces a universal masking policy for all teachers, students, staff, and visitors.

Staff and students who do not fall within exceptions 1-5 above must quarantine if they are a close contact, regardless of the location of exposure.

Staff and students who only fall within exceptions 4-5 must quarantine in the community, per Maine CDC quarantine guidelines.

### III. OUTBREAK RESPONSE

Beginning in January 2022, Maine CDC will open an epidemiological investigation in a school when at least either 15% of students or staff are absent due to illness. This approach is consistent with Maine CDC's approach to other communicable diseases, including other respiratory illnesses.

Schools will use the absenteeism reporting module in NEO, which is the standard process for reporting health-related absenteeism. Schools who do not have access to NEO should report the 15% absenteeism to Maine CDC by email to [disease.reporting@maine.gov](mailto:disease.reporting@maine.gov) (do not send any personal identifying information), by fax at 207-287-6865, or by phone to 1-800-821-5821.

When a school reports 15% absenteeism in either students or staff, Maine CDC will follow up with the school to obtain additional information and determine if the absenteeism report meets outbreak status. An outbreak in a school is defined as greater than or equal to 15% absenteeism among either students or staff in a single day where the majority of those absent are due to COVID-19 illness. Among other pieces of information, Maine CDC will inquire about:

- Number of COVID-19 positive students and staff;
- Number of COVID-19 positive students and staff by test type (PCR or antigen);
- Number of students and staff who are in quarantine and not in school; and
- Number of students and staff working/attending remotely.

After the initial 15% absenteeism report, a school must then report absenteeism daily while in outbreak status.

Outbreaks will be closed after 14 consecutive days with reports of <15% absenteeism. If a school on day 15 has ≥15% absenteeism, then a new outbreak would be opened.

The school should notify all associated individuals of the outbreak (*see* Section IV below). School officials should make such notifications in writing, using a template provided by Maine CDC (*see* Appendix E).

School outbreak status does not necessarily warrant school closure and can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Maine CDC may, however, recommend suspending some or even all in-person extra-curricular activities for the duration of the outbreak.

### IV. NOTIFICATION AND COMMUNICATION

#### **Notification of a Confirmed or Probable Case to Maine CDC**

School officials may be notified of a confirmed or probable case among a student or staff member by the individual or parents (if the case is a student). If school staff are notified by a parent/guardian that their child received a positive COVID-19 test result, school staff should contact the designated school personnel. That individual will report the suspect case using the DOE Positive Case Reporting Form. The school may be notified by either Maine DOE or Maine CDC if the case is confirmed or probable, and the school may begin its notifications of close contacts. The designated school personnel will be the communication link among the family, the Maine DOE and the Maine CDC.

### **Communication with Family Members**

Maine CDC recommends that the designated school staff member communicate with the family of a case (when that case is a student). The designated school staff member will be best suited to provide information to the family. The designee should also reach out to the DOE COVID-19 Hotline or use the reporting link to inform Maine DOE and Maine CDC of the case. The school should notify family members of students that will be in quarantine, if applicable. Sample letters are available in the appendices.

### **Communication with School Community**

Maine CDC recommends that the school notify community members as school-associated confirmed or probable cases are detected. The school is best able to notify parents, staff, teachers, and other community stakeholders (*e.g.*, Board of Education, Superintendent, etc.) of the confirmed or probable case(s). Sample letters for such communication are available in the appendices.

### **Public Reporting**

Maine CDC may report publicly when an epidemiological investigation has confirmed an outbreak of COVID-19 associated with a school, as it does in other settings. Schools should notify their school community before Maine CDC announces a school is in outbreak status when possible.

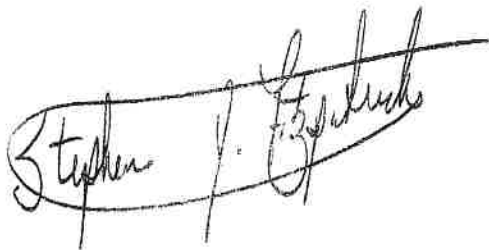
No After Hours hotline info....

## V. GLOSSARY

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Close contact	In general, being within 6 feet of a person infected with COVID-19 (with or without a face mask) for at least 15 minutes (cumulatively in a day).
Community transmission	Occurs when individuals acquire COVID-19 through contact with someone in their local community, rather than through travel to an affected location.
Confirmed case	A person who has tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 infection (the virus that causes COVID-19) using a molecular test.
Contact tracing	Process of identifying and notifying individuals who have had close contact (see definition above) with someone infected with COVID-19.
Cohort	A consistent group of students and staff who interacts with each other but not with members of other groups on a regular basis. When in a cohort, each group must physically distance themselves from each other and from other cohorts.
Fully vaccinated	2 weeks after the second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's vaccine.
Incubation period	The time between exposure to an infection and the appearance of first symptoms. SARS-CoV-2 has an incubation period of 2-14 days.
Infectious period (asymptomatic cases)	2-days prior to the date the specimen/swab was collected, until federal CDC criteria to discontinue isolation are met.
Infectious period (symptomatic cases)	2-days before any symptom onset within 10 days prior to positive test result until federal CDC criteria to discontinue isolation are met.
Isolation	Process of separating individuals who are infected with COVID-19 from others.
Outbreak investigation	Greater than or equal to 15% absenteeism among students or staff in a single day where the majority of those absent are due to COVID-19 illness.
Pooled testing participant	An individual who is participating in school pooled testing that has either tested in the most recent pooled testing or was absent and used an antigen or molecular test in place of pooled testing.
Probable case	Individual who has a positive antigen test or is a symptomatic close contact of a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19.
Quarantine	Process of separating and restricting the movement of persons who were in close contact with someone who tested positive or had symptoms of COVID-19.
Symptomatic individual	A person who is experiencing one or more of the <a href="#">symptoms</a> of COVID-19 as defined in U.S. and Maine CDC guidelines.
Testing	Three types of tests are available for COVID-19: molecular, antigen, and antibody tests. Molecular and antigen tests indicate if you have a current infection while antibody tests indicate a previous infection. In this SOP, 'testing' refers to molecular or antigen-based tests to diagnose a person with COVID-19 infection.

Universal masking	A policy of requiring consistent and correct usage of well-fitting masks in indoor spaces for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors, and across all school-based and school-sponsored activities. A universal masking policy allows for removal of masks while eating/drinking in designated spaces, but not for indoor "mask breaks."
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Reviewed 3/31/22

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