



Mississippi State Department of Health Public Health Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in K-12 Settings, 2021-2022 School Year

Introduction

Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction continues to be a priority. Each school/school district should continue to put in place measures to reduce transmission and maintain a safe school environment.

Please review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools available at [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC](#)

The following updated Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) Public Health Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 transmission in Mississippi K-12 school settings supersedes previous MSDH K-12 guidance. **The guidance is intended to supplement, not replace, the CDC guidance and provide MSDH specific recommendations for continued in-person classes for the 2021 school year.**

MSDH Public Health Guidance

Vaccination

All eligible students, teachers, and staff 12 years of age and older should receive COVID-19 vaccination.

Vaccination remains the primary public health prevention strategy to end transmission and allow for safe participation of in-person classes and school sponsored extracurricular activities. Schools should continue to promote COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible students, teachers, and staff.

Advantages of having the eligible (12 years of age and older) students, teachers, and staff fully vaccinated (2 weeks after the second dose of vaccine in a 2-dose series, or 2 weeks after a single dose vaccine):

- ***When fully vaccinated, you can return to activities you participated in prior to the pandemic.***
- ***No masks are recommended for fully vaccinated persons while indoors in school settings.***
- ***Keep the learning environment safe for in-person learning.***
- ***Lower the risk of transmission and reduce the severity of illness if infected.***
- ***If exposed to COVID-19, no quarantine or testing is necessary for fully vaccinated individuals unless symptoms develop, keeping students and staff fully engaged.***

MSDH is committed to facilitating on-site COVID-19 vaccinations for all interested schools through the development of an Adopt-a-school program. MSDH is working to put in place



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partnerships with local providers and healthcare systems through the COVID-19 Community Vaccination Partnership (CCVP) to directly provide COVID-19 vaccinations to all eligible students, teachers, and staff so all schools and school districts have the opportunity to have COVID-19 vaccinations available.

When a local provider partners with an adopted school, barriers are removed.

- All students, teachers and staff 12 years old and above have access to vaccinations regardless of socioeconomic status.
- Parents do not have to search or disrupt normal routines to locate appropriate vaccine and provider.
- Schools can choose dates that best accommodate the school schedule.

School/School Districts Role

- Partnership to ensure appropriate school age children have access to the Covid-19 Vaccine.
- Help obtaining consent from parental guardians.
- Designation of space for a vaccination clinic at your location.
- Support from trusted members of the educational community and school board.

Please visit <https://msdh.ms.gov/AdoptASchool> for additional details about the Adopt-a-school program. If your school or school district has interest in participating in onsite COVID-19 vaccinations for all eligible students, teachers, and staff, email your interest with the name of your school/school district and point of contact to Covid19vaccine@msdh.ms.gov

Mask Use

Masks should be worn indoors in school settings by all individuals (age 2 and older) who are *not fully vaccinated*.

Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and in crowded settings, when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Children 2 years of age and younger should not wear a mask.

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors, but masks should be considered in crowded outdoor settings or during activities of close prolonged contact with other students/teachers who are not fully vaccinated.

Masks are not recommended for fully vaccinated individuals, though schools may consider universal masking of all students, teachers, and staff as an additional layer of prevention.

Certain fully vaccinated individuals who are immunocompromised, 65 years of age or older, or have underlying medical conditions that place them at risk may choose to wear a mask at all times while indoors.



Physical Distancing

Schools should maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by people who are not fully vaccinated, to reduce transmission risk.

This guidance is made with an understanding of the potential physical constraints and other barriers in classroom settings when providing in-person classes for all students.

The current definition of exposure to COVID-19 remains 15 minutes of cumulative contact over a 24-hour period at <6 feet; however, there are exceptions in the classroom setting dependent upon mask use and vaccination status. **See the contact tracing section for additional guidance on the identification of individuals in the school setting who are exposed to COVID-19.**

Screening Testing

Routine screening testing of *asymptomatic unvaccinated* students, teachers, and staff is recommended as an additional measure to prevent further transmission.

Screening testing can identify potential cases and prompt rapid isolation and quarantine of individuals exposed to COVID-19 who are not fully vaccinated.

Recommended algorithm for schools and school districts engaged in screening testing:

- Weekly screening of all interested **asymptomatic unvaccinated** teachers, staff, or students.
- Weekly screening of **asymptomatic unvaccinated** students (and teachers/coaches) participating in school sponsored extracurricular activities of any type, including sports, as a condition of participation (school district decision).

Screening tests can also be utilized as follows:

- Unvaccinated contacts to cases (15 minutes of cumulative contact over a 24-hour period at <6 feet. Exceptions apply to the <6 feet rule for certain students—see contact tracing section for guidance): Unvaccinated students and staff who are exposed to COVID-19 **will not require exclusion** from school for quarantine if they receive COVID-19 testing every two days and remain asymptomatic. At the end of 7 days, they will no longer require testing.
- Screening tests may be utilized for **asymptomatic unvaccinated** students/teachers/staff participating in school-sponsored summer programs or other school sponsored activities as a condition of participation.

Additional Considerations:



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- ***Fully vaccinated students and teachers/staff (2 weeks after completion of one-dose or two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series) do not require weekly asymptomatic screening.***
- ***Fully vaccinated students and teachers/staff do not require quarantine or testing after contact to an infected person.***
- Screening testing is not designed for symptomatic individuals. Any symptomatic student or teacher/staff should continue to be excluded from school/school district and be evaluated by their primary medical provider.

MSDH has developed a School Based Testing Initiative to facilitate onsite screening testing for all unvaccinated asymptomatic students and teachers/staff at interested schools and school districts. The program has two phases. In Phase 1, MSDH directly provides interested school districts with COVID-19 rapid tests for schools to conduct individual screening tests. More information can be obtained at [School-Based COVID-19 Testing Initiative - Mississippi State Department of Health \(ms.gov\)](#) In Phase 2, vendor agreements managed by MSDH will support on-site school-based testing for all interested schools and school districts. More details will be provided to schools and school districts regarding Phase 2 soon.

Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the MSDH School Based Testing Initiative are completely voluntary for all schools and students/teachers and staff.

Managing Positive and Negative Tests in School Based Screening Testing

Positive Tests

- Asymptomatic individuals who test positive with the rapid screening test should be excluded from the school setting for 10 days from the date of the test as long as they remain asymptomatic. If they develop symptoms, they should be excluded for a full 10 days from the onset of symptoms and are fever free for 24 hours before returning.
- Asymptomatic individuals with a positive rapid antigen test who have a negative molecular based COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the rapid positive do not require further exclusion and may return to the school setting. This only applies to molecular based tests (i.e., PCR) and does not include an additional antigen test or antibody tests.

Negative Tests

- Asymptomatic individuals with a negative rapid test may continue in-person classes and extracurricular activities.
- Asymptomatic contacts to a case should receive rapid testing every two days until 7 days after last exposure to the positive case.



Isolation, Contact Tracing, and Quarantine

Schools should continue to isolate and exclude COVID-19 infected students, teachers, and staff and continue contact tracing to identify exposed individuals for quarantine and exclusion from the school setting.

- Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should be excluded from the school setting and remain in **Isolation** for a full 10 days from the onset of symptoms and are fever free for 24 hours (or excluded for 10 days from the date of the test if asymptomatic).
- Asymptomatic individuals with a positive rapid COVID-19 test who have a negative molecular based COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the rapid positive do not require further exclusion and may return to the school setting. This only applies to molecular based tests (i.e., PCR) and does not include antigen test or antibody tests.
- Schools should continue **Contact Tracing** to identify all individuals who are in close contact to COVID-19 within the school setting or in extracurricular activities. Close contact to COVID-19 is defined as 15 minutes of cumulative contact over a 24-hour period at <6 feet, with the following exceptions:
 - ***Fully vaccinated persons in close contact with an infected person do NOT have to quarantine or get tested unless they develop symptoms.***
 - People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered do not have to quarantine or get tested again as long as they do not develop new symptoms.
 - In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, unvaccinated individuals within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student do not have to quarantine if both students were wearing masks.
 - In all other settings the standard definition of close contact applies.
- Students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated and are identified as close contacts to COVID-19 should be in **Quarantine** for a full 14 days. There are additional options to the 14-day quarantine period from the school setting as follows:
 - 10-day option: Quarantine can end after 10 days if the individual has no symptoms during the entire 10-day period, or
 - 7- day plus test option: If the individual has no symptoms for 7 days and has a negative test result with any form of molecular based testing for the detection of COVID-19 RNA collected on day 5, 6, or 7 of the quarantine period, the quarantine period can be discontinued quarantine after 7 days, or
 - Unvaccinated students and staff who are exposed to COVID-19 **will not require exclusion** from school for quarantine if they receive any type of COVID-19 testing every two days and remain asymptomatic. At the end of 7 days, they will no longer require testing.



Exclusion When Sick

All students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of any infectious illness, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home from school and be evaluated by their healthcare provider.

Students, teachers, and staff should not be allowed to return to school until symptom and fever free for at least 24 hours, or if COVID-19 is diagnosed, until the isolation criteria for return to school are met.

Reporting

Mississippi K-12 schools are asked to provide weekly reports of cases among students, teachers and staff, number of outbreaks, and teachers and students under quarantine as a result of COVID-19 exposure. An outbreak in a school setting is defined as 3 or more individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 in the same group within a 14-day period. Please utilize the attached survey to report <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MSDHDData>