

COVID-19 and Schools Frequently Asked Questions

December 1st, 2021

Updates in italics

1. What guidance and resources are available to schools for the 2021-2022 school year?

Schools will need to follow the updated California Department of Public Health (CDPH) school guidance for the 2021-2022 school year [here](#). Ventura County Public Health (VCPH) is aligning mostly with the CDPH school guidance. Any deviations from the guidance will be listed in this FAQs document. Schools can visit the [State of California Safe Schools for All Hub](#) for technical assistance, reporting concerns and the latest news on reopening schools for in-person instruction. Schools can also visit the Ventura County Recovers [website](#) for up-to-date information on school guidance.

2. What is the face covering guidance for the 2021-2022 school year?

All students are required to wear face coverings indoors unless exempted per [CDPH face mask guidance](#). Adults in K-12 school settings are required to wear face coverings when sharing indoor spaces with students. Persons who meet the criteria for face covering exemption must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it. Face coverings are optional outdoors in all K-12 school settings. Schools must develop and implement protocols to provide face coverings to students who inadvertently fail to bring a face covering to school. Schools should offer alternative educational opportunities for those students who refuse to wear face coverings while in indoor school settings. Schools must develop and implement local protocols to enforce the face covering requirements.

3. What is the physical distancing guidance for the 2021-2022 school year?

Per updated [CDPH guidance](#), recent evidence indicates that in-person instruction can occur safely without minimum physical distancing requirements when other mitigation strategies (e.g., face covering) are implemented. This is consistent with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) K-12 School Guidance](#).

4. Are schools required to do daily symptom screening for the 2021-2022 school year?

VCPH strongly encourages schools to continue with active and passive COVID-19 symptom screening. Students and staff should follow the strategy from the [CDC for Staying Home when Sick and Getting Tested](#). Students and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care. Staff and students with symptoms of COVID-19 infection should be advised to not return for in-person instruction until they have met the VCPH criteria to return to school.

5. What is considered a “fever?”

While CDPH uses 100.5°F as the threshold for a fever, VCPH will continue to use 99.5°F as a threshold for fever.

6. What is the guidance for a student who has symptoms but no known exposure to a positive case?

The [current guidance](#) advises staff members and students with symptoms of COVID-19 infection not to return for in-person instruction until they have met CDPH criteria to return to school for those with symptoms:

- No fever in the last 24 hours (without fever-reducing medications); and
- Improvement of symptoms; and
- A negative COVID-19 Antigen or PCR test OR note from doctor confirming another underlying medical condition OR note from doctor confirming another diagnosis OR at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset.

7. Are schools required to report cases of COVID-19 to the local health department?

Yes, per AB 86 (2021) and California Code Title 17, Section 2500, schools are required to report COVID-19 cases to the local public health department. VCPH will continue to utilize Shared Portal for Outbreak Tracking (SPOT) for reporting cases. This can be done by emailing covidschools@ventura.org with the following information:

- Date of COVID-19 Exposure
- Name of the School
- Identify a Positive Case or Close Contact

For schools that have not reported through SPOT, the VCPH COVID-19 School Team will assist school liaisons in creating a SPOT account. For any questions on COVID-19 reporting or SPOT, please email covidschools@ventura.org.

8. What is the current quarantine guidance for unvaccinated students in which the positive case AND the close contact were wearing face coverings in an indoor or outdoor school setting?

If a close contact exposure (more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period within 0-6 feet) occurs with an unvaccinated student and both the positive case and the contact were wearing face coverings in an indoor or outdoor **school setting**, the close contact may continue to attend in-person instruction if they:

- Are asymptomatic;
- Continue to wear a face covering as required; **AND**
- Undergo at least twice weekly testing during the 10-day quarantine.

This modified quarantine is only for attending in-person classroom sessions. Students who are under this modified quarantine cannot attend any extracurricular activities (e.g., school related sports, conditioning, band practice).

Students may end modified quarantine after Day 7 if a test specimen (i.e., antigen diagnostic test, PCR/molecular diagnostic test, or pooled PCR/molecular test) is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.

For the frequency of testing while in modified quarantine refer to the CDPH FAQs [here](#).

9. Can the After School Education and Safety (ASES) program and after school childcare programs be included as an instructional activity for students on modified quarantine?

Yes, the ASES program and after school childcare programs are included activities under modified quarantine for students in Ventura County. Extracurricular activities such as music and sports are not included activities in modified quarantine and therefore cannot be done during after school programs while a student is on modified quarantine.

10. What are the quarantine duration recommendations for unvaccinated close contacts in standard quarantine (i.e., students who were not wearing masks or when the infected individual was not wearing a mask during the exposure)?

- 14-day quarantine: This remains the safest and preferred option. CDC still recommends a quarantine period of 14 days based on the upper bound estimates of COVID-19 incubation period. If any symptoms develop in the next 14 days from the last exposure, the exposed person must immediately isolate, get tested and contact their healthcare provider with any questions regarding their care.

If the contact remains asymptomatic (meaning they have NOT had any symptoms), they can discontinue self-quarantine under the following conditions:

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 from the date of last exposure without testing OR
- Quarantine can end after Day 7 if a test specimen (i.e., antigen diagnostic test, PCR/molecular diagnostic test, or pooled PCR/molecular test) is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.

For the frequency of testing while in standard quarantine refer to the CDPH FAQs [here](#).

11. If an *unvaccinated* student has an exposure off school campus, would they qualify for modified quarantine?

No, they would need to follow the 7, 10, or 14 day at home quarantine options. Students only qualify for the modified quarantine if the exposure happened on school campus and masks were worn during the exposure by both the positive case and contact. *Fully vaccinated asymptomatic students do not need to quarantine if they have an exposure off campus.*

12. What guidance should staff follow for a close contact exposure?

Staff should follow Cal/OSHA guidance for close contact exposures found [here](#). Currently Cal/OSHA guidance allows asymptomatic staff to discontinue quarantine under the following conditions:

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 from the date of last exposure without testing OR
- Quarantine can end after Day 7 if a test specimen (i.e., antigen diagnostic test, PCR/molecular diagnostic test, or pooled PCR/molecular test) is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative

Fully vaccinated employees are not required to complete a quarantine unless they are symptomatic.

13. When is an individual considered fully vaccinated?

An individual is considered [fully vaccinated](#):

- 2 weeks after their [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 Janssen vaccine

14. How should schools verify vaccination status of staff and students?

Refer to the [CDC vaccine verification recommendations](#) to implement vaccination status, as well as other prevention strategies (e.g. testing, contact tracing efforts, and quarantine and isolation practices).

15. What are the current isolation requirements for COVID-19?

Persons diagnosed with COVID-19 need to follow [CDPH isolation guidance](#) regardless of their vaccination status.

16. What are the new testing requirements and what are the resources available to schools for testing?

Any school currently open is subject to the minimum testing requirement standards established by [Cal/OSHA](#). Screening testing can be used at a cadence of every 2 weeks or less frequently, to understand whether the settings have higher or lower rates of COVID-19 rates than the community, to guide decisions about safety, and to inform local health departments. Schools are strongly encouraged to implement screening testing. The updated CDPH testing guidance can be found [here](#). CDPH has provided resources and additional information on testing through the [COVID-19 Testing Task Force](#). The CDPH K-12 Testing Program is available to any public, private and charter K-12 schools in California and will be free for schools. Schools can email schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov to receive support and information on the various testing strategies available to schools, help in determining which testing will be best for the school, and to enroll in a testing program.

17. Does an antigen test require confirmation with a PCR test?

CDPH has updated guidance and no longer requires an antigen test to be confirmed with a PCR. Repeat antigen testing and/or confirmatory PCR testing should be considered in individuals who receive a negative result with an antigen test but have symptoms specific for COVID-19 (such as loss of taste and smell). This guidance can be found [here](#).

18. What type of test may be used to assess a person's status during quarantine or to exit quarantine?

An FDA-approved antigen diagnostic test, PCR diagnostic test, or pooled PCR test is acceptable for evaluation of an individual's COVID-19 status during quarantine. Collection of test specimens for persons during quarantine may occur in schools, healthcare settings, or other locations supervised by school or healthcare personnel. Specimens may be processed at the point-of-care (POC) or in a laboratory.

19. What is the process for schools to follow if a student or staff member has a positive in-home test?

In the absence of the CDPH guidance on in-home testing, VCPH strongly encourages any positive in-home test results to be followed up with an *antigen or PCR* COVID-19 test for confirmation.

If the individual chooses not to follow up with a test and had a confirmed close contact within the past 14 days and/or COVID-19 symptoms, the individual should complete a 10-day quarantine from the date of the positive test or date of symptom onset.

In order to be exempt from quarantine or any testing requirements for the next 90 days, the individual MUST have a confirmed positive COVID-19 test shortly after testing positive with an in-home test.

20. Do schools need to report positive home tests to SPOT if the individual does not follow up with a COVID-19 test?

If the individual is symptomatic and/or had a confirmed close contact exposure within the past 14 days, then schools should report to VCPH. Schools may submit a picture of the positive test to covidschools@ventura.org. If the individual is asymptomatic and did not have a confirmed close contact exposure within the past 14 days, then schools do not need to report to VCPH. This individual should quarantine for 10 days from the positive test date.

21. At what point would a school have to close completely?

Individual school closure is recommended based on the number of cases, the percentage of the teacher/students/staff that are positive for COVID-19 and following consultation with the Health Officer. Individual school closure may be appropriate when there are multiple cases in multiple classrooms or stable groups at a school or when the total is 5% of the total number of teachers/students/staff are cases within a 14-day period, depending on the size and physical layout of the school. The Local Health Officer may also determine school closure is warranted for other reasons, including results from a public health investigation or other local epidemiological data.

22. What are the criteria for closing a school district?

A superintendent may close a school district if 25% or more of schools in a district have closed due to COVID-19 within 14 days, and in consultation with VCPH. Districts may typically reopen after 14 days.

23. How do schools determine when to shut down a classroom due to multiple positive COVID cases?

Schools should consult with VCPH about any concerns they have with multiple COVID cases in a classroom. VCPH will need to do in depth case and outbreak investigation before requiring a classroom to shut down. Schools may close a classroom at anytime they feel it would be best to do so without authorization from VCPH.

24. What guidance should schools follow for sports and other school-based extracurricular activities?

The November 24 update to the CDPH K-12 school guidance continues to require masks indoors for participants in school-based extracurricular activities, but allows for no masking for indoor sports and band instrument playing with weekly testing under certain circumstances. Specifically, section 16 of guidance (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/K-12-Guidance-2021-22-School-Year.aspx>) states:

“When actively practicing, conditioning, or competing in indoor sports, masks are required by participants even during heavy exertion, as practicable. If masks are not worn due to heavy exertion, it is strongly recommended that individuals undergo screening testing at least once weekly. An FDA-approved antigen test, PCR test, or pooled PCR test is acceptable for evaluation of an individual's COVID-19 status.”

VCPH is in alignment with this updated CDPH Guidance and strongly recommends once weekly PCR or twice weekly antigen testing for vaccinated and unvaccinated students when no masks are worn. The PCR test or one of the antigen tests should be performed within 2 days prior to a competition. If there are multiple games, all games within the 2 day period are allowed on 1 test. Some competition schedules may require more than one test for multiple games in the same week. When participants are not actively competing or performing, they are expected to wear masks. Coaches, spectators and the players on the side-lines must wear masks. This guidance is subject to local change as knowledge accumulates which supports more effective means of limiting COVID transmission, especially in light of new variants of concern such as Omicron.

25. Can schools have large indoor events on a school site?

VCPH strongly encourages schools to hold any large events outdoors with face coverings on. Per CDPH and CDC recommendations, in areas of substantial to high transmission, people who are not fully vaccinated are encouraged to wear a mask in **crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated**. If schools choose to hold these events indoors, they must follow the mega event guidance depending on how many attendees are present. Mega event guidance can be found [here](#) and the CDPH FAQs [here](#).

When hosting dances and large assemblies, the following considerations are strongly encouraged:

- Host such events outdoors whenever possible.
- Separate the event into smaller cohorts (by grade, for example) whenever possible.
- Ensure all eligible attendees (students and adults) are fully vaccinated. Conduct pre-entry testing for all unvaccinated attendees at or just prior to the event.
- Plan in advance how to identify close contacts if it is later discovered that someone with COVID-19 attended the event. Consider requiring pre-registration with CA Notify and maintaining a log of all attendees (even those arriving pre-event) at the door/entrance to the event.
- Consider requiring the use of masks at outdoor school-based large, crowded events. (Masks remain required indoors as per CDPH K-12 Guidance.
- If food or drinks are to be served, serve them outdoors whenever possible and/or place them away from other areas to clearly designate spaces where masks must be worn.

26. What should schools do when a student or staff members receives a “presumptive positive” test result with the state color lab?

CDPH has provided guidance for the interpretation and actions to take for the various test results provided by their lab. This guidance can be found [here](#). Specifically, for their “presumptive positive result” the state says: A presumptive positive test result (also known as inconclusive or indeterminate) indicates that you had a marginal trace of the COVID-19 virus in your specimen. This may mean you are either very early in your COVID infection and the amount of virus is just beginning to rise, or you are later in your COVID infection and the overall amount of virus is declining. It could also mean you are infected with COVID, but the sample that was taken for testing only captured a minimal amount of the virus when swabbing.

CDPH has provided guidance that an individual with this result should submit a new sample and self-isolate until the result of the repeat test is known.

27. Which K-12 settings should be the focus for school-based contact tracing efforts?

During outdoor recess, transient interactions between students are unlikely to meet the close contact definition of being within 6 feet for 15 minutes, per CDPH. Schools should continue to contact trace both indoor and outdoor exposures with prolonged stationary activities (within 0-6 feet for 15 minutes or more) such as in classrooms, when eating lunch, choir practice, band, and other indoor school-based activities. Outdoor sports and school dances should also be contact traced due to the frequent and sustained contact involved with these activities. Indoor activities are frequently associated with outdoor sports and school dances (i.e., locker rooms, transportation, communal meals, etc.), which are still considered to be settings at higher risk of transmission.

28. How should school staff determine whether a student's symptoms are due to being infected or recently vaccinated against COVID-19?

Most post-vaccination symptoms occur within the first 3 days of vaccination (the day of vaccination and the following 2 days, with most occurring the day after vaccination). Testing may help determine whether symptoms should be attributed to COVID-19 infection that could occur prior to the body's ability to develop immunity from the vaccine, which typically takes about two weeks after the vaccination. Vaccination does not cause positive antigen and PCR test results for COVID-19.

Additionally, many of [CDC's post-vaccine considerations for workplaces](#) apply to K-12 schools, including information about signs and symptoms not caused by COVID-19 vaccination (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, loss of taste or smell). Suggested approaches for assessing and responding to post-vaccination symptoms are also provided.