Recommendations for Pre-K to 12 Schools Following Identification of a Case(s) of COVID-19

This page was updated on November 23, 2020.

To address school leaders' need for additional guidance in responding to COVID-19 cases in a school setting, the Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH) and Education (PDE) are providing recommendations to Pre-K to 12 schools for use in consultation with public health staff when making decisions related to school procedures following a case of COVID-19 in a school.

When a case of COVID-19 is identified in a school setting, public health staff from DOH or the County or Municipal Health Department (CMHD) will work with school administrators to provide guidance and advice related to cleaning and disinfecting, contact tracing and quarantine recommendations, and closing certain areas of the school or entire school buildings if necessary. When entire school buildings are recommended to close, lengths of closure time will vary by level of community transmission and number of cases. Schools within a CMHD jurisdiction should work with their local health department when responding to cases of COVID-19 in a school setting. This allows public health staff the necessary time to complete case investigations and contact tracing, and to provide schools with other appropriate public health advice like cleaning and disinfecting.

The recommendations provided in the chart below complement the recommendations from DOH and PDE for

Determining Instructional Models During the COVID-19 Pandemic
(/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopen-ingGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/Pages/DeterminingInstructional-Models.aspx)

and the

Public Health Guidance for School Communities
(/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopen-ingGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/de-fault.aspx#hygiene)

. The recommendations apply to individual schools, not an entire school district or Local Education Agency (LEA).

Recommendations for Small (<500 Students) Pre-K to 12 School Buildings Following Identification of a Case(s) of COVID-19

It is important to note that a significant and/or widespread outbreak may require moving to a more remote-based instructional model more quickly. DOH will provide proactive consultative assistance to school entities should such an outbreak occur.

COVID-19 Symptomatic K-12 Student or Staff Process Flow

The COVID-19 Symptomatic K-12 Student or Staff Process Flow (/Documents/K-12/Safe%20Schools/COVID/GuidanceDocuments/COVID-19%20Symptomatic%20K-12%20Student%20or%20Staff%20Process%20Flow.pdf) (PDF) provides steps schools should take when a student or staff present with symptoms of COVID-19 but are not a confirmed case.

Webinar

Access a webinar that outlines several scenarios based on the "Recommendations for Pre-K to 12 Schools Following Identification of a Case(s) of COVID-19" (https://youtu.be/nWAqSsJMB14) chart available on this page.

Quarantine vs. Isolation

An infographic created by the Pennsylvania Department of Health provides information on the differences between isolation and quarantine (https://www.health.pa.gov/top-ics/disease/PublishingImages/Iso-lation%20vs%20quarantine.jpg)

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Level of Community Transmission Table

Access levels of community transmission of COVID-19 for all counties in Pennsylvania. (/Schools/safeschools/emergen-cyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolRe-openingGuidance/ReopeningPre-Kto12/Pages/LevelofCommunity-TransmissionTable.aspx)

mission in the County (/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolRe-openingGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/Pages/DeterminingInstruc-tionalModels.aspx#1)	Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 1 student or 1 staff	Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 2-4 students/staff in same school building who are not household contacts	Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 5+ students/staff in same school building
Low	• School does not need to close • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 3-5 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school(s) • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Moderate	• School does not need to close • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 3-7 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school(s) • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Substantial[†]	• School should consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• School should consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site • Close school(s) for 3-7 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• School should consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site • Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine

* If case investigations, contact tracing, and cleaning and disinfecting can be accomplished in a faster time frame, the length of closure time may be

counties with substantial level of community transmission. Schools that choose to pursue in-person instruction or other models in which school buildings are utilized by students and/or staff should follow the recommendations here.

Recommendations for Medium (500-900 students) Pre-K to 12 School Buildings Following Identification of a Case(s) of COVID-19

It is important to note that a significant and/or widespread outbreak may require moving to a more remote-based instructional model more quickly. DOH will provide proactive consultative assistance to school entities should such an outbreak occur.

Level of Community Transmission in the County (/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/Pages/DeterminingInstructionalModels.aspx#1)	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 1-3 students or staff	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 4-6 students/staff in same school building who are not household contacts	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 7+ students/staff in same school building
Low	• School does not need to close • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 3-5 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school(s) • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Moderate	• School does not need to close • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 3-7 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school(s) • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine

	consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site	consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site	consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site
	• Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 3-7 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine

* If case investigations, contact tracing, and cleaning and disinfecting can be accomplished in a faster time frame, the length of closure time may be shortened.

†DOH and PDE recommend a Full Remote Learning Model for all schools in counties with substantial level of community transmission. Schools that choose to pursue in-person instruction or other models in which school buildings are utilized by students and/or staff should follow the recommendations here.

Recommendations for Large (>900 students) Pre-K to 12 School Buildings Following Identification of a Case(s) of COVID-19

It is important to note that a significant and/or widespread outbreak may require moving to a more remote-based instructional model more quickly. DOH will provide proactive consultative assistance to school entities should such an outbreak occur.

Level of Community Transmission in the County (/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolRe-openingGuidance/Re-openingPrekto12/Pages/DeterminingInstructionalModels.aspx#1)	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 1-5 students or staff	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 6-10 students/staff in same school building who are not household contacts	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a rolling 14-day period: 11+ students/staff in same school building

	need to close • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	for 3-5 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	for 14 days* • Clean entire school(s) • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Moderate	• School does not need to close • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 3-7 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school(s) • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Substantial[†]	• School should consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site • Clean area(s) where case spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• School should consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site • Close school(s) for 3-7 days* • Clean area(s) where cases spent time • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine	• School should consider altering schedule to significantly decrease number of students on site • Close school(s) for 14 days* • Clean entire school • Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine

* If case investigations, contact tracing, and cleaning and disinfecting can be accomplished in a faster time frame, the length of closure time may be shortened.

† DOH and PDE recommend a Full Remote Learning Model for all schools in counties with substantial level of community transmission. Schools that choose to pursue in-person instruction or other models in which school-buildings are utilized by students and/or staff should follow the recommendations here.

What is case investigation, contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine?

Public health staff is responsible for case investigation and contact tracing for every case of COVID-19, regardless of level of community transmission or number of cases identified in a school setting. Refer to DOH's

Contact Tracing Frequently Asked Questions
(https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guid-
ance/Contact-Tracing-FAQ.aspx)

for a complete overview of the case investigation and contact tracing process.

Cases are people who have been infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/faq-s
case definition 🗗 urveillance.html)   for
COVID-19 includes confirmed and probable cases.

Isolation is when the public health staff direct cases to stay home, in a hospital, or in a care facility to ensure they do not expose others with COVID-19. Individuals who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should be immediately isolated while waiting for test results. Public health staff handles case investigation steps including determining close contacts during the infectious period.

Close contacts are individuals who have been exposed (within 6 feet distance for at least 15 consecutive minutes) to someone who is a case during the infectious period, and it is unknown if the contact will go on to develop COVID-19. See

DOH Health Alert Network (HAN) 533
(https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/HAN/2020-PAHAN-533
-10-26-ADV%20-%20Additiona.pdf)

for more information on determining a close contact. Public health staff determine close contacts after a case interview. In some school situations, it might be difficult to determine whether individuals are contacts or whether an entire cohort, classroom, or other group (extracurricular activity members) might need to be considered exposed, particularly if people have spent time together indoors.

Public health staff will work with school administrators to determine whether entire classrooms or other cohort groups need to be quarantined. Based on these discussions, public health staff will direct close contacts to **quarantine** for 14 days from the last exposure to the case; this includes household contacts (like siblings and parents/guardians/caregivers) who attend or work in other schools.

What are the recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting in a school setting?

until after

cleaning and disinfecting ☑ (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disin-fect/index.html)

. This may include a classroom, common areas used by the case(s) such as lunchrooms and restrooms, gyms and locker rooms, school transportation options like a bus or van, and in some cases, the entire school building. Students should not be present when disinfectants are being used and should not participate in disinfecting activities.

To protect the health of janitorial and cleaning staff, schools should wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible. Ensure

safe and correct use ☑ (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)

and storage of

cleaning and disinfection products ☑

(https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-a gainst-sars-cov-2)

, including storing products securely away from children. More information on cleaning and disinfecting is available in the DOH and PDE

Public Health Guidance for School Communities

(/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopen-ingGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/de-fault.aspx#hygiene)

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What should schools do when a student or staff present symptoms of COVID-19 but are not a confirmed case?

It is **not necessary** to notify DOH or CMHD staff of every symptomatic student or staff member, since many non-COVID-19 illnesses may present with similar symptoms. School administrators should contact DOH or CMHD for further guidance if a parent/guardian/caregiver notifies the school of potential exposure by a student, staff member, or school visitor. Refer to the DOH and PDE

COVID-19 Symptomatic K-12 Student or Staff Process Flow

(/Documents/K-12/Safe%20Schools/COVID/GuidanceDocuments/COV ID-19%20Symptomatic%20K-12%20Student%20or%20Staff%20Pro-cess%20Flow.pdf)

(PDF) for steps schools should take when a student or staff present with symptoms of COVID-19 but are not a confirmed case.

Access a webinar outlining several scenarios based on the chart above ☑

(https://youtu.be/nWAqSsJMBl4)

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