

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH)

COVID-19 Prevention and Response

Guidelines for Education Settings

Education Settings are trusted community partners that can help the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection through sharing information, implementing layered prevention strategies, and quickly responding to known COVID-19 exposures.

These guidelines are intended to help education settings in LA County support safe, in-person learning by outlining strategies and specific actions you should take to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19. This document consolidates and replaces the earlier LACDPH setting-specific Prevention Guidelines and Exposure Management Plan documents. It applies to the following types of facilities:

- Early Care and Education (ECE) sites
- TK-12 schools
- Programs serving school-aged children, including day care, camps, and youth sports programs
- Institutes of Higher Education (IHE)

The word “site” applies to all facility types and includes both instructional and non-instructional locations. The word “student” applies to all students, children, enrollees, athletes, members, or other non-staff participants at the site. The word “staff” applies to all employees, interns, volunteers, or other individuals who carry out work at the site. Additional resources for education sites are in the [Education Settings COVID-19 Toolkit](#).

Summary of required actions

- 1) **Required:** Site must notify cases to follow [Isolation Instructions](#). Cases may return when the criteria for ending isolation have been met.
- 2) **Required:** Per [Cal/OSHA](#), site must notify staff close contacts of exposures and actions to take. It is strongly recommended that site also notifies student close contacts.
- 3) **Required:** If there is a cluster of 3 or more cases in a classroom, office, or in a pre-defined group (i.e., cohort, team, or club, etc.) who were linked and on campus at any point within 7 days of each other, the site must notify LACDPH by reporting online at spot.cdph.ca.gov. Reporting should occur within 1 business day of being notified of the third, or last, case in the cluster.
- 4) **Required:** If LACDPH determines outbreak criteria have been met, site must comply with requirements issued by LACDPH Outbreak Investigation Team. In addition, site must follow Outbreak regulations as outlined by [Cal/OSHA](#).
- 5) **Required:** As employers, sites must adhere to all requirements outlined by [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#). This includes the requirement to provide respirators when requested by an employee.
- 6) **Required:** Each Local Education Agency (LEA) is required to develop a COVID-19 testing plan or adopt the [California Department of Public Health School Testing Framework](#) per [State Bill 1479](#). An LEA is defined as a school district, county office of education, or charter school serving pupils in kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive. See [Senate Bill 1479 Implementation Questions and Answers](#) for details.



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Best Practices to Prevent COVID-19 in Education Settings

Designate a staff member to serve as a COVID-19 LACDPH liaison. This staff member is responsible for communicating with LACDPH to facilitate public health response, including reporting of outbreak associated cases per the [LA County Health Officer Order](#). Please see the [LACDPH reporting requirements](#) below.

Ensure compliance with State COVID-19 testing plan requirements (e.g., [SB-1479](#)) and the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#).

Vaccination

Everyone 6 months and older should get the [updated fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine](#) to protect themselves and reduce the spread of the virus. Vaccination is the best way to protect against serious illness and death caused by COVID-19. The updated vaccine can increase prior protection (from previous vaccination or infection) that may have decreased over time.

For information about the updated fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine including authorized vaccines, vaccine safety, and where to get vaccinated, visit the [VaccinateLAcounty.com](#) webpage ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)). For information on how to have a mobile team come to your school to offer vaccines, contact the School Support Team at 213-351-7800 or SchoolSupport@ph.lacounty.gov. Additional resources including flyers and hand-outs for parents can be found at ph.lacounty.gov/educationtoolkit.

Ventilation

Increasing ventilation is a highly effective way to reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus through the air. Make sure your site's HVAC system is in good working order and frequently inspected. Ask an HVAC professional about installing MERV 13 filters, optimal setting of the HVAC system, and providing the recommended minimum of five Air Changes per Hour (ACH). Consider other ways to improve ventilation:

- Install portable high-efficiency air cleaners in rooms with less ventilation.
- When weather and working conditions allow, and if it is safe to do so, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors.
- Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows.
- Open windows on buses as air quality and rider safety allow.
- Offer physical education classes outdoors as weather conditions and air quality allow.
- Decrease indoor occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.

Refer to the following resources for more information:

- [Best Practices for Gymnasium Ventilation](#)
- [American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers \(ASHRAE\) recommendations](#)
- CDPH [Interim Guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#)
- Cal/OSHA [COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulation FAQs-Ventilation](#)
- CDC [Ventilation in Buildings](#)



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Test for COVID-19

In accordance with [SB 1479](#), each Local Education Agency is required to develop a COVID-19 testing plan or adopt the [California Department of Public Health School Testing Framework](#) and post its plan on its website. An LEA is defined as a school district, county office of education, or charter school serving pupils in kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive. SB 1479 allows LEAs to either create a COVID-19 testing plan or adopt the [CDPH Framework](#). See [Senate Bill 1479 Implementation Questions and Answers](#) for further information.

Routine testing of asymptomatic students is no longer recommended. Encourage staff and students to [test for COVID-19](#) if they have symptoms, have been exposed, or have recently been in crowded, poorly ventilated spaces without a mask (such as during travel). It is helpful to have students and staff test prior to returning to school after vacations. Additional testing recommendations may be made based on outbreaks and [LA County COVID-19 hospital admission levels](#).

There are different [types of COVID-19 tests](#). Antigen and PCR tests are both viral tests that look for current infection, and both are acceptable to use for recommended and required testing. Antigen tests are not as good at detecting the COVID-19 virus as PCR tests, meaning you might get a false negative result. For this reason, the [FDA recommends repeating negative antigen tests](#).

Per Cal/OSHA, sites must offer free testing during paid time and in a manner that ensures confidentiality to all staff close contacts exposed at work. Sites with an active outbreak must adhere to additional testing requirements for exposed staff (refer to the [Testing](#) and [Outbreak](#) sections of Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations FAQ).

Free antigen testing is available through LACDPH for ECE, TK-12 schools, youth camps, and after school programs. Free tests are also available for IHE who serve vulnerable students including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Sites are asked to distribute free antigen tests to their students, staff, and families to ensure easy access to testing for all members of the school community. Please visit this page to request free antigen tests for your school: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/COVID19-Test-Request-Schools-Childcare>.

Most at-home tests can be safely used past the date on the box. Check the FDA's [At-Home COVID-19 Test page](#) to see if the expiration date of your test kit has been extended. Note, the expiration date on the box is printed as year- month - day. For example, 2022 11 20 means November 20, 2022.

Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

General Masking Guidelines

[Masks](#) help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Masks should be worn by individuals with known or suspected exposures to COVID-19 for 10 days from their last exposure. Masks should also be worn by anyone with a known COVID infection leaving isolation between days six and ten.

For a mask to work well, it needs to have both a [good fit and good filtration](#). While all masks provide some level of protection, well-fitting respirators (such as N95, KN95, and KF94) provide the best protection.

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County indoor [mask wearing rules and recommendations](#) change based on local metrics, which are updated regularly on the [LA County COVID-19 Response Plan](#) website.

Masking Guidance for Employers

Employers are required to offer well-fitting medical masks and respirators (with instructions on proper fit) at no cost to employees who work indoors and have contact with others or who are in vehicles with others. Staff may also request masks and respirators at no cost. See [Wear a Mask and Know your Rights](#).

Employers must comply with [Cal/OSHA](#) masking rules, which may be more protective for workers in certain situations such as when cases meet the criteria to return to work before day 10 or during an outbreak.

Sites should ensure that employees engaged in providing personal assistance to students have access to appropriate PPE per [Cal/OSHA](#).

No person should be prevented from wearing a mask to participate in an activity unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard.

Masking in School Nurse Offices

Masks are strongly recommended in school nurse offices since these areas provide direct patient care. If a student goes to the school nurse office with symptoms, the student should be given a mask and appropriate PPE should be worn by the school nurse. School nurse offices should have an adequate supply of masks to distribute to students using the nurse office.

Other Considerations

There may be times when masking is required in indoor public settings; this would include a masking requirement in indoor spaces at all schools. During times when universal masking is required in indoor public settings, accommodations should be made for students who cannot tolerate masks or when mask use affects safety, learning, or an existing disability. Children younger than 2 years should never wear a mask due to suffocation risk. A mask exemption (with certification from a licensed health care professional) may be considered for people who:

- Are hearing impaired or communicating with someone who is hearing impaired.
- Have a medical or mental health condition in which wearing a mask has been determined by a health care provider to be unsafe.

Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Hand Hygiene

Regularly cleaning surfaces helps prevent the spread of germs that make people sick. Facilities should regularly clean frequently touched surfaces and objects such as door handles, stair rails, and elevator buttons. They should also clean surfaces when they are visibly dirty. In addition to cleaning, disinfect areas where people have been obviously ill (e.g., vomiting on surfaces). See [CDC When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility](#) for more information.

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Educate children on [hand hygiene](#) and regularly remind them of the importance of keeping hands clean especially after bathroom breaks, before lunch, or after playing outside. Ensure access to hand hygiene facilities and supplies. Where handwashing is not available, ethyl alcohol-based hand sanitizers are preferred over those with isopropyl alcohol, which is more irritating and can be absorbed through skin. Ensure adult supervision for children under 9 years to prevent ingestion and alcohol poisoning and that staff have the number for Poison Control (1-800-222-1222).

Responding to COVID-19 in Education Settings

Education settings should continue to investigate and respond to any COVID-19 cases identified at the site. Current State laws and regulations require schools to exclude staff and students who have a communicable disease while contagious.¹ These LACDPH guidelines are intended to support education settings in developing and implementing exclusion and return to school criteria related to COVID-19. As employers, education settings must also refer to the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#) for COVID-19 workplace requirements.

Staff and Students with Symptoms of Possible COVID-19

People with symptoms of possible COVID-19 infection should wear a mask, isolate, and test for COVID-19. Refer to LACDPH's [Learn about Symptoms and What to do if You are Sick](#). Those who test negative using an antigen test but continue having COVID-19 symptoms should continue to isolate and retest in 2 days as recommended by the [FDA](#). Those who test negative can resume normal activities when they have been fever-free without the help of fever reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

Staff and Students with COVID-19 (Cases)

Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 infection (cases) must stay home away from others for a minimum of 5 days, wear a well-fitting mask if there is a need to be in the same room as others, and follow all [isolation instructions](#). People who are [at risk for getting very sick](#) with COVID-19 who test positive should consult with a healthcare provider right away for possible [treatment](#). Many adults and some children qualify for treatment.

- **Students** who meet the [criteria](#) to end isolation after Day 5 should continue to wear a well-fitting mask indoors around others through Day 10, unless they have two sequential negative COVID-19 tests taken at least one day apart.
- **Staff** who meet the criteria to end isolation after Day 5 and are returning to work are required by Cal/OSHA to wear a well-fitting mask through Day 10. For further information about staff isolation and return to work, refer to [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#).
- Individuals who have a return or worsening of COVID-19 symptoms after isolation ends may have [COVID-19 rebound](#) and should retest with an antigen test. If they test positive, they should restart isolation.

¹ [Title 17 California Code of Regulations, section 2526](#); [Title 5 California Code of Regulations, section 202](#); [California Health and Safety Code, section 120230](#)

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- [Support students](#) who are learning at home if they are isolating. Ensure that employees are not penalized when they stay home due to illness.

Staff and Students Exposed to COVID-19 (Close Contacts)

1. Student/non-staff [close contacts](#) to a COVID-19 case do not need to stay home away from others as long as they test negative and do not have symptoms. They should follow the same instructions as close contacts in the community:
 - Wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others indoors through Day 10. The following exceptions apply:
 - Children under 2 years who are close contacts should not wear a mask but may remain at the facility if they are monitored for symptoms.
 - Students with a mask exemption who are close contacts should wear a face shield with drape at the bottom if their condition allows. Students who cannot tolerate a mask or a face shield with drape should test for COVID-19 immediately after exposure and then again between Days 3-5 after last exposure, with at least 24 hours between the first and second tests.
 - Test for COVID-19 between Days 3-5 after last exposure. Refer to LACDPH's [Instructions for Close Contacts](#) and [Guidelines for COVID-19 Cases \(Isolation\) and Close Contacts](#). Close contacts who test positive for COVID-19 must stay home away from others and follow instructions for a confirmed COVID-19 case.
 - Monitor for symptoms for 10 days after last exposure. If symptoms develop, stay home away from others and test immediately.
2. Staff who are close contacts exposed at work must have access to COVID-19 testing available at no cost during paid time in a manner that ensures confidentiality. See [Cal/OSHA FAQ - Testing](#). Employers are required to follow guidance in [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#). See also LACDPH's [Responding to COVID-19 in the Workplace](#).

Communication and Notifications About Exposures

Parents should immediately inform the site when a student tests positive for COVID-19 and was on site during the student's [infectious period](#). When sites are notified of a confirmed COVID-19 case, it is strongly recommended that they notify students who were exposed to the COVID-19 case during the case's infectious period and provide them with instructions for close contacts (above). If an individual with confirmed COVID-19 participated in any games, performances, tournaments, competitions, or other site-related activities involving other sites during their infectious period, it is strongly recommended that the COVID-19 LACDPH liaison notify the impacted site(s) of potential exposure. Sites are required to notify employees if they have been exposed to a known COVID-19 case in the workplace during the case's infectious period per [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#).

Outbreaks

If LACDPH determines that outbreak criteria have been met, a Public Health Outbreak Investigator will contact the site to coordinate an Outbreak Investigation. During the Outbreak, the site must comply with

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additional requirements issued by LACDPH. The site is also responsible for complying with regulations outlined per [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#).

Reporting Clusters of COVID-19 Cases to LACDPH

The COVID-19 LACDPH liaison is required to notify LACDPH within 1 day of all clusters of at least 3 linked COVID-19 cases within 7 days per the [LA County Health Officer Order](#).

- All site-associated COVID-19 clusters should be reported through the secure web application, Shared Portal for Outbreak Tracking (SPOT): spot.cdph.ca.gov.
- All clusters with case information should be reported to LACDPH immediately, no later than 1 business day of being notified of the third or last case in the cluster.
- Sites that need assistance with COVID-19 case reporting can contact Communityoutbreak@ph.lacounty.gov.
- LACDPH will determine if the criteria for a COVID-19 outbreak have been met and provide guidance accordingly. In outbreak settings, LACDPH may implement temporary strategies that are more protective than these guidelines to prevent further spread of COVID-19 at the site.
- Sites may be required to report suspected outbreaks to other agencies. Reporting to LACDPH does not eliminate these additional reporting requirements.

Special Considerations

Youth Sports and Extracurricular Activities

Physical exertion and activities with increased or more forceful breathing, such as contact sports, singing, playing wind instruments, dancing, or enunciating during theatrical rehearsal and performances, will increase the risk of viral transmission, especially indoors and when community transmission is elevated. Improving ventilation and ensuring participants are encouraged to stay home when sick are important strategies to reduce transmission. Schools, performing art classes and clubs, and youth sports clubs and leagues may choose to consider taking a more cautious approach and implement stricter masking or testing policies around these higher risk activities. Schools and programs may consider temporarily stopping these activities to control a school- or program-associated outbreak, or during periods of high COVID-19 hospital admission levels.

Early Care and Education (ECE)

During times when masking is recommended, consider layered prevention strategies for young children who may have difficulty wearing a well-fitting mask consistently and correctly. These include encouraging vaccination among staff and children, improving ventilation, and avoiding crowded spaces.

Students with Disabilities or Underlying Medical Conditions

Schools with students at risk for getting very sick with COVID-19 should make reasonable accommodations when necessary to ensure that all students, including [those with disabilities and underlying medical conditions](#), are able to access in-person learning (e.g., screening testing or masking in certain settings to protect students with immunocompromising conditions). Students with conditions or



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disabilities that increase their risk for getting very sick with COVID-19 should not be placed into separate classrooms or otherwise segregated from other students. Camps for children with immunocompromising conditions or serious illnesses should layer multiple [preventive actions](#) as recommended by the CDC especially during periods of high transmission.

Additionally, students of all ages with disabilities and underlying medical conditions have unique challenges in accessing their classes, using support tools, and finding the resources they need to stay engaged while being at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 than their peers. Educational programs should consider implementing broad-based supports and flexibility that are responsive to their needs both at home and in class. See the US Department of [Education website](#) for further details on requirements to provide access to education for those students as well as resources.

K-12 Residential Dorms and Overnight Child Care

LACDPH recommends following the same guidelines for isolation, instructions for close contacts, and testing guidance for these congregate settings as for the general population. Refer to the [LA County COVID-19 Response Plan](#) for prevention strategies to implement based on local COVID-19 hospital admission levels.

In specific circumstances where the student population may be at higher risk for severe illness, facilities may opt to implement stricter guidelines, such as a 10-day period for isolation and screening testing during high hospital admission levels. Schools and ECE programs should balance the potential benefits of following that guidance with the impact these actions would have on student well-being, such as the ability to participate in in-person instruction, food service access, and social interactions.

Institutes of Higher Education (IHE)

Each IHE should have a COVID-19 prevention plan that addresses the need to provide isolation housing for COVID-19 cases among students who reside on campus.

For information about international vaccines, see current [CDC recommendations](#).

College sports teams should follow the most recent [NCAA COVID-19 guidelines](#).

Mental Health Support and Resources

Beyond getting sick with COVID-19, many children's and adolescents' social, emotional, and mental well-being has been impacted by the pandemic, which may have long-term consequences across their lifespan. Visit [CDC's COVID-19 Parental Resources Kit](#) for resources by age group and the LA County Department of Public Health's [Mental Health Toolkit for Parents and Guardians of Teens](#).