

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH)

COVID-19 Prevention and Response

Guidelines for Education Settings

Summary of recent changes (January 23, 2024) In alignment with the updated CDPH and Cal/OSHA guidance, LAC DPH defines isolation period for COVID-19 as follows:

- Individuals with COVID-19 who have symptoms shall stay home away from others until fever free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication AND other symptoms are mild and improving. Individuals with COVID-19 who leave isolation before 10 days from symptom onset or the date of their first positive test if no symptoms need to wear a mask when around others. Individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 and have no symptoms are not required to isolate only if they wear a well-fitting, high-quality respiratory mask whenever around other people for 10 days following their positive test result.

For the full LA County guidance, see [LAC DPH Instructions for COVID-19 Cases and Close Contacts](#).

Education Settings are trusted community partners that can help the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections through sharing information, implementing layered prevention strategies, and quickly responding to 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 common respiratory viruses. They apply 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 develop policies and make every effort to enforce [LACDPH Instructions for COVID-19 Cases and Close Contacts](#).
- 2) Required:** Per [Cal/OSHA](#), site must notify exposed staff of actions to take. It is strongly recommended to also notify exposed students.
- 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](#).
- 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](#). See [Senate Bill 1479 Implementation Questions and Answers](#) for details.

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Best Practices to Prevent Respiratory Illness in Education Settings

COVID-19, influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are common respiratory diseases with cough and cold symptoms. Most people recover on their own without complications, but some people are at [higher risk of getting very sick](#). This guidance outlines strategies and specific actions to help prevent and reduce the spread of respiratory infections.

Designate a staff member to serve as a Communicable Disease LACDPH liaison (CD 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](#).

Immunization

Immunizations are the best way to protect against serious illness and death caused by COVID-19, influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Everyone 6 months and older should stay [up to date](#) with their COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves and reduce the spread of the virus. Staying up to date can increase prior protection (from previous vaccination or infection) that may have decreased over time.

For additional information 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 publichealth.lacounty.gov/educationtoolkit.

Everyone 6 months and older should get a [flu vaccine](#) every season, especially those at [higher risk of getting very sick with the flu](#). Getting vaccinated may reduce the risk of ending up in the hospital. See [Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine](#) as well as [LAC DPH Flu](#) page for more details.

[RSV immunizations](#) help protect infants, young children, and adults 60 years and older from serious complications. Babies can be protected either through maternal vaccination during pregnancy at 32-36 weeks, or by giving an RSV antibody immunization to infants younger than 8 months. Adults 60 years and older should talk to their healthcare provider about RSV vaccination. See [RSV Prevention](#) and [RSV Vaccine Facts](#) for more information.

Air Filtration and Ventilation

Increasing ventilation is a highly effective way to reduce transmission of viruses 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:

- LACDPH [Classroom Ventilation Recommendations](#)
- LACDPH [Best Practices for Gymnasium Ventilation](#)
- [American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers \(ASHRAE\) recommendations](#)

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- 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](#)

Test for COVID-19

In accordance with [SB 1479](#), 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](#) 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. See [Senate Bill 1479 Implementation Questions and Answers](#) for further information.

Staff and students should [test for COVID-19](#) if they have symptoms or a known exposure. Testing for those with symptoms should happen immediately after symptoms develop. Those who are asymptomatic should test within 3-5 days after exposure, especially if they or someone they are in contact with is at higher risk of severe disease.

It may be 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](#).

Cal/OSHA may have additional requirements for employees. 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 and other respiratory illnesses. Everyone who can safely mask should wear a mask when they are sick with cough, cold, or COVID-19 symptoms and need to be around others. Masks must be worn when around others in the following situations:

- If you test positive for COVID-19 and have symptoms of COVID-19, for 10 days after becoming sick.
- If you test positive for COVID-19 and have no symptoms, for 10 days after the positive test.

Masks are strongly recommended for those who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, for 10 days after your last exposure.

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. County 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

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situations such as when cases 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 cough, cold, flu, or COVID-19 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

During times when masking is required, 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 in light of symptom-based isolation 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.

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).

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Responding to COVID-19 in Education Settings

Education settings must 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 Individuals are responsible for adhering to [LACDPH Instructions for COVID-19 Cases and Close Contacts](#). These instructions are outlined below and 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 a Possible Respiratory Infection

People with symptoms of possible COVID-19 infection should wear a mask, stay home and away from others, and test for COVID-19. Those who test negative using an antigen test but continue having COVID-19 symptoms should continue to isolate and test again 48 hours later. Consult [LACDPH Symptom Guidance for Schools](#) for additional recommendations.

Staff and Students with COVID-19 (Cases)

Staff and students with a COVID-19 infection need to adhere to these instructions regardless of their vaccination status, history of previous infection, or lack of symptoms. For the full guidance, refer to [LAC DPH Instructions for COVID-19 Cases and Close Contacts](#).

1. Isolate (Stay Home)

Staff and students with COVID-19 must stay home and away from others if symptomatic and/or with fever. Isolation can end when both of the following criteria are met:

- Have not had a fever for 24 hours without taking medication that reduces fevers **AND**
- Other symptoms are not present or are mild and improving.

Additionally:

- Staff and students with COVID-19 who **do not have symptoms** are not required to isolate **only if** wearing a high-quality mask in all settings when around others, for 10 days after first testing positive.
- A person leaving isolation prior to 10 days from the date of a positive test and/or onset of symptoms is required to [wear a mask](#) when around others for the 10 days.
- It is strongly recommended that an individual test for COVID-19 prior to ending isolation and extend isolation until day 10 if they continue to test positive.
- Schools can continue to implement more protective policies including adhering to the prior guidance on isolation for those testing positive for COVID-19, particularly among high-risk settings with medically complex students.

2. Wear a mask

All individuals with COVID-19 shall wear a well-fitting, high-quality mask for a total of 10 days from symptom onset or their first positive test date (if asymptomatic) when around others. This includes individuals who test positive and have no symptoms or only mild symptoms.

- Masks can be removed sooner if the individual meets the criteria to end isolation and obtains two sequential negative tests taken at least one day apart.

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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3. Tell close contacts

Close contacts should be informed that they may be infected, so that they are aware and can take appropriate next steps to protect themselves and others within their community. For more information, see Communication and Notifications About Exposures section below.

Additional Considerations

- Individuals whose symptoms return or worsen after initially improving may have [COVID-19 rebound](#) and should stay home and retest with an antigen test.
- [Support students](#) who are learning at home if they are sick. Ensure that employees are not penalized when they stay home due to illness.

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

The term Close Contact refers to the following:

- **In indoor spaces of 400,000 or fewer cubic feet per floor** (such as classrooms and offices): A close contact is defined as sharing the same indoor airspace for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) during a confirmed case's infectious period.
- **In large indoor spaces greater than 400,000 cubic feet per floor** (such as open-floor-plan offices, warehouses, and some gymnasiums): A close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of the infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period during the confirmed case's infectious period.

Exposed staff and students should:

1. [Wear a well-fitting mask](#) around others for 10 days after last exposure.
 - Children under 2 years should not wear a mask but may remain at the facility if they are monitored for symptoms.
2. **Monitor for symptoms** for 10 days after last exposure. If symptoms develop, stay home away from others and test immediately.
3. [Get tested](#) within 3-5 days after last exposure. If recently recovered from COVID-19 in the last 90 days, review [testing recommendations](#). Staff who are 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 while [infectious](#). When sites are notified of a COVID-19 exposure on site, it is strongly recommended that they notify students who were exposed and provide them with [instruction for close contacts](#) (above). If an individual with COVID-19 participated in any games, performances, tournaments, competitions, or other site-related activities involving other sites while symptomatic, it is strongly recommended that the CD liaison notify the impacted site(s). 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 additional requirements issued by LACDPH. The site is also responsible for complying with regulations outlined per [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#).

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Reporting Clusters of COVID-19 Cases to LACDPH

The CD liaison is required to notify LACDPH within 1 day of all clusters of at least 3 linked COVID-19 cases among exposed staff and students 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.

Further information about reporting outbreaks of other communicable diseases, including influenza, can be found at publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/schools.

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 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

In a classroom with predominantly high-risk children, schools may want to consider implementing stricter isolation requirements. This could include a 5-day exclusion period for COVID-19 positive staff and students, requiring a negative test to return before day 10, and/or temporarily re-assigning staff with regular contact with high-risk students.

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 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 respiratory virus season or 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 severe disease from respiratory illnesses than their peers. Educational programs should consider

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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 COVID-19 guidelines 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 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 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](#).