StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12)
Frequently Asked Questions

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General

Where can I find all COVID-19 public health guidance documents for NC’s schools?
Visit [https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance#schools](https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance#schools) for the most up-to-date NCDHHS guidance for NC’s schools.

How are children affected by COVID-19?

I have specific questions about my child and my school. Where can I find more information on how my school is acting on the public health guidance provided by NCDHHS?
Every child and every school are unique. NCDHHS provides statewide public health guidance through the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12)](https://www.strongschoolsnorthcarolina.org). Contact your school and/or district to find out more information about how they are operating their facilities.

Where can I find Spanish versions of the Public Health Toolkit and other resources?
Click [here](https://www.strongschoolsnorthcarolina.org) for the Spanish version of the Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit. Check back regularly on the [NCDHHS guidance page under Education](https://www.covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance) for additional translated documents.

Where can I find information about vaccination for students, teachers, and school staff?
NCDHHS has released updated Back to School [Operational Guidance for Vaccinations](https://www.covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance). This guidance includes recommendations for school administrators on how to get students (age 5 and up), teachers and school staff vaccinated. Getting more North Carolinians vaccinated is the most important thing we can do to slow the spread of COVID-19 and keep our kids safely at school. This guidance includes information such as steps for holding vaccine events, utilizing incentives to encourage vaccination and communication materials to educate and combat misinformation.

Masks

When are masks required?
Masks are required following a COVID infection unless an exception applies. Following 5 days of isolation, masks should be worn for an additional 5 days.

When are masks recommended?
- Masks are recommended following an exposure to a person with COVID-19.
- Masks are recommended in indoor settings for people at high risk for severe disease and for those who are not up to date on vaccines.
- Because masks can add a layer of protection for those who want it, schools should support students and staff who choose to wear a mask.
Keeping Schools Clean

**How will we keep schools clean enough to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread?**
The StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12) outlines actions that schools should take to minimize the spread of COVID-19 such as vaccination promotion, physical distancing, ventilation, and thorough cleaning and hygiene routines.

**Is hand sanitizer safe for schools to use?**
Providing hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol for students and staff is a recommended component of the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol are known to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 virus and can be placed in dispensers and other containers that are readily available for student use. This availability of hand sanitizer should not be considered a violation of 15A NCAC 18A.415(b). While Executive Order No. 116, (Declaration of a State of Emergency to Coordinate Response and Protective Actions to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19) or another State of Emergency declaration is in effect during the school year, such hand sanitizer dispensers may be used by students without being considered a violation of Rule 18.2415 if handled in a safe manner supervised by teachers or other adults in accordance with the directions on the label, and bulk containers of hand sanitizer are stored according to manufacturer’s instructions when not in use.

**How should an isolation room be kept clean if it needs to be used more than once in a school day?**
NCDHHS recommends using this guidance from the CDC on cleaning and disinfection to inform these practices. Waiting 24 hours before cleaning may not be practical in school settings for an isolation room, so we recommend increasing ventilation between sick students and providing disinfection of the areas once the student leaves—of course, following manufacturer’s instructions for use and contact time.

**Positive cases and exposure**

**Why is daily symptom screening for children no longer recommended?**
NCDHHS is aligning with the CDC that does not currently recommend schools conduct daily symptom screening for students. The effectiveness of COVID-19 symptom screening in schools is not well-known. Children are more likely to have no or minimal symptoms from COVID-19 and symptom screening will fail to identify some students who have COVID-19. Symptom screening will also identify children who do not have COVID-19 and will unnecessarily exclude students from school. Further, symptom screening has the potential to exclude certain students repeatedly, such as those with chronic medical conditions, from school even though they do not have COVID-19 or any contagious illness. K-12 schools provide essential educational, developmental, and support services to students and families. Therefore, excluding students from school has different consequences from excluding individuals from other settings. This makes the considerations for symptom screening in students in K-12 schools different from those for other settings or populations. However, parents, caregivers, or guardians (“caregivers”) should be strongly encouraged to monitor their children for symptoms of infectious illness every day through home-based symptom screening. Students who are sick should not attend school in-person.

**Will the Local Health Department share identifying information about my school, me, or my child if we contract the virus?**
Your privacy and your child’s privacy are prioritized during this health crisis. Information may be shared under GS 130A-143(4) when necessary for public health and implementation of control measures. A local health department may share more information about a person who has tested positive with a school if it is “necessary to prevent transmission in the facility or establishment [i.e., school] for which they are responsible.” However, the local health department is responsible for ensuring that a school is instructed to protect confidentiality.

NC Department of Health and Human Services
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NCDHHS does not publicize the names of individuals who test positive for COVID-19, nor the name of a school that an individual works at or attends. If a cluster (five laboratory-confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 that have a connection at a specific location or a specific event) outbreak is reported at a school, NCDHHS will post the name of the school, public or private, to this public report released twice weekly.

**What are the requirements for exclusion from school and isolation and quarantine?**

Exclusion from school of asymptomatic people after an identified exposure is no longer recommended in K-12 schools. Although exclusion from school is no longer recommended following an exposure, when a COVID-19 case is identified in the school setting, schools should notify potentially exposed students and their parents, or staff so they can receive appropriate public health guidance, testing, and access to any resources that might be needed.

Local public health officials may continue requiring exclusion of exposed students and staff if determined necessary based on local conditions.

For more information on isolation requirements, continue reading below and refer to the CDC guidance on isolation for K-12 schools.

**Is compliance with the isolation provisions set out in the StrongSchools Toolkit required?**

Yes. Pursuant to G.S. 130A-144, all persons are required to comply with communicable disease control measures. The applicable control measures for COVID-19 are prescribed by the Commission for Public Health at 10A NCAC 41A .0201 and are aligned with the guidelines and recommended actions published by the CDC. The isolation provisions in the StrongSchools Toolkit reflect these mandatory control measures. Local health directors and the state health director have the authority under G.S. 130A-144 and 130A-145 to enforce control measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 or any other communicable disease posing a significant threat to the public health.

**What are the requirements for isolation?**

If a student/employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, they must remain out of school and isolate until 5 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.

If a person with symptoms is diagnosed with COVID-19 by a medical professional based on a test or their symptoms or does not get a COVID-19 test but has had symptoms, they should not be at school and should isolate at home until they (or a family member if younger child) can answer YES to the following three questions:

1. Has it been at least 5 days since the individual first had symptoms?
2. Has it been at least 24 hours since the individual had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine)?
3. Has there been symptom improvement, including cough and shortness of breath?

**Is there any required documentation for teachers/students who tested positive to return to school?**

NCDHHS does not require students and employees to provide documentation of a negative test prior to returning to school after having a positive diagnosis for COVID-19.

**How are “Exposure” and a “Close Contact” defined?**

Exposure to COVID-19, or being in close contact with a case, is defined as being within 6 feet of another person for 15 minutes cumulatively or longer, within a 24-hour period (e.g., 5 minutes in at arrival, 5 minutes at lunch, and 5 minutes at dismissal).
COVID-19 Testing

What testing resources are available to schools?
In April 2021, the CDC released funding to states to support screening testing for school year 2021-2022. NCDHHS has elected to use funds to provide the following testing support to K-12 schools throughout the state, on an opt-in basis. Schools will be able to choose from two options for their testing program: utilizing a state-contracted vendor or performing testing independently. Additionally, public schools may request funding to hire temporary school health staff. Schools may choose to enroll in the testing program to implement a test to stay strategy.

Districts, charter and independent schools interested in receiving state support for their 2021-22 school year testing programs must fill out the NCDHHS K-12 Testing Program Opt-in Form. This form has been sent to school/district administrators and should be completed once per school/district. Districts (LEAs) should complete the form on behalf of ALL schools in their district. As of January 2022, additional schools may be interested in implementing a test to stay program. For more information, please review the NCDHHS K-12 COVID-19 Testing Program Guidance.

Can a student receive a COVID-19 test without the consent of a parent or guardian?
In general, receiving consent from parents or guardians for student testing for COVID-19 is the expectation and will be the normal process. However, pursuant to G.S. 90-21.5, minors with decisional capacity may consent for testing for COVID-19 (a novel coronavirus), as it is considered a medical health service for the diagnosis of a reportable disease. For more information on K-12 COVID testing, refer to NCDHHS K-12 COVID-19 Testing Program Guidance.

Contact Information

My question has not been answered here. Whom should I contact?

For Families
- For questions specific to your child’s school, such as scheduling, operations, remote learning options, and specifics about screening procedures, reach out to your local school leaders, such as your school’s principal.
- For questions about your child’s school’s adherence to public health guidance, contact your local school board, your school district leadership (superintendent), or the NC State Board of Education.

For Local Education Leaders and Local Health Departments
- For questions about NCDHHS statewide guidance not covered in this FAQ document, email StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov.
- The NC DHHS Division of Public Health Epidemiologist is on call and available to assist 24/7 (919-733-3419)