



**COVID-19 Testing Guidance and approach to respiratory infections for K - 12
Issued May 2024**

This guidance has been revised to reflect CDC's updated "Respiratory Virus Guidance" issued 3/1/2024 [Respiratory Virus Guidance \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory/virus-guidance). The layered prevention strategies in the updated guidance are applicable to infectious respiratory diseases including COVID-19, influenza, and RSV.

Regular school-based testing (diagnostic, screening and/or post-exposure testing), in addition to testing and staying home when sick, vaccination, physical distancing, good ventilation, and proper mask wearing, especially when community transmission levels are high, are effective strategies to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases.

TEST TYPES

All available test types can be used for any testing strategy. However, PCR tests should not be used to determine infectiousness/return to school after a period of recommended isolation.

PCR tests can be used to diagnose COVID-19 as a primary test, or as a secondary test when an antigen test is negative, and COVID-19 is strongly suspected. PCR tests should not be used to confirm a positive antigen test result. If PCR tests are not available and COVID-19 is strongly suspected with a negative antigen test result, the antigen tests can be repeated in 24-48 hours.

Point of Care (POC) Tests: Schools can provide POC tests within schools or other test sites within the school district.

Over the Counter (OTC) Tests: While schools are encouraged to continue offering onsite testing, OTC take-home tests expand testing access and options, decreasing onsite workload. OTC testing should make it easier to keep up with potential surges and increased testing demands. Easy access and the free distribution of OTC tests are encouraged. Schools should create plans for students/staff to pick up tests from their school or school district. OTC can, for instance, be given out at parent-teacher nights and be freely available and visible at the schools' front offices. To increase access, alternative community locations for tests pick-ups may also be considered, such as public libraries, fire stations, or other community partners.

SCHOOL-BASED TESTING PROGRAMS

School-based testing helps prevent transmission of communicable diseases, helps schools meet increased testing demands during surges and will help limit school outbreaks.

KDHE will continue to provide rapid testing options that are free, quick, and easy to use to help identify persons infected with a respiratory virus.

Test Strategies can be Diagnostic or Screening

Diagnostic testing can be Symptomatic Testing or Exposure Testing

- **Symptomatic Diagnostic Testing:** Testing anyone with [COVID-19 Symptoms](#) that became symptomatic at school during the school day or develop symptoms while at home.

What to do if someone tests positive?

- We recommend that they stay home and away from others. They can begin returning to normal activities when, for at least 24 hours, BOTH are true:
 - symptoms are improving overall, AND
 - no fever is present, without using fever-reducing medication.
- Once normal activities are resumed, additional precautions can be taken for the next 5 days to curb disease spread, such as taking more steps for cleaner air, enhancing hygiene practices, wearing a well-fitting mask, keeping a distance from others, and/or getting tested for respiratory viruses to help determine what to do next.
- If a fever develops or symptoms worsen after an individual has returned to normal activities, they should return home and stay away from others until, for 24 hours, symptoms have improved AND the person should be fever-free without the use of fever reducing medication.
- **A positive antigen test signifies probable ongoing infectiousness, even in the absence of symptoms.**
- Treatment is available for COVID-19 and Influenza which can lessen the severity of symptoms, shorten illness duration, and can lower the risk for severe illness and complications.

What to do in case of potential exposure?

Monitor for symptoms and test if symptoms develop.

What to do if someone tests negative?

Repeat testing is recommended when a test result is negative, the person is symptomatic, and there was a documented exposure to someone with COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 to reduce the risk of an infection being missed. Repeat an antigen test 24-48 hours later.

TESTING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and/or the county local health departments (LHDs) of negative and/or positive test (POC or OTC) results are not required. However, per the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), individuals have the right to receive a written notification of their test result. Schools may choose to continue reporting results to KDHE via LabXchange, which can notify patients of their results, or may plan an alternative strategy for communicating results.

Outbreaks remain reportable to the Epidemiology hotline 24/7 at 877-427-7317, option 5. An outbreak is defined as two or more cases within a 7-day period that are epidemiologically linked in the school setting and are not known to be a close contacts outside of the school setting.

Expectations, Requirements and Considerations for K-12 School Districts:

- Schools should always follow public health guidelines and, if necessary, reach out to their LHD for support.

- Communicate that it is the responsibility of families to monitor their children for signs of COVID-19 or other respiratory infections and to keep them home when sick.
- Individual responsibility is expected for testing and, when testing positive, to notify the school and/or close contacts about potential exposure. Students/staff who test positive should inform the school promptly.
- Schools should follow applicable legal requirements related to consent for testing; staff should not be tested without consent and students should not be tested without the consent of both the student and their guardian.
- Schools should keep test results confidential and only share results with those who by law, including local and state Public Health, may have access.
- Encourage students/staff to stay home when they feel ill and get tested.
- Schools can consider requiring student/staff who tested positive and whose symptoms have improved overall AND who has been fever-free for 24 hours without using fever reducing medication to obtain a negative result on a rapid antigen test before returning to school.
- Schools should continuously re-evaluate and adapt their multi-layered approach to mitigate spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. Strategies include physical separation, hygiene and disinfection, vaccination messaging, testing, improved ventilation, and masking.