



## **Responding to COVID in Schools**

*This is advice from the Division of Public Health. Districts and charter schools should consult with their legal team for any legal advice.*

### **How should schools prepare to respond to positive COVID cases?**

In developing their plans, school districts and charters will identify school and district level leads. The school nurse should serve as the school level lead, and a district office administrator or charter leader should serve as the COVID coordinator for the district or charter. The school nurse will work with an epidemiologist from DPH to support case investigation and contact tracing, which includes assessing each unique situation and determining if other students or staff should be quarantined or tested. The school nurse should always be in close contact with the COVID coordinator.

If a positive case occurs, the following process should be followed:

- The school nurse will contact the Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology within the Division of Public Health (DPH) at 1-888-295-5156 and report the case. If DPH learns of the school-related positive case first, DPH will contact the school nurse.
- DPH would then assign an epidemiologist to perform the investigation.
- The school nurse should keep the district or charter-level COVID coordinator in the loop for consistency of communication and messaging.

### **How should the school expect to find out that a student or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19?**

Schools will trigger a priority response from DPH to the school, and DPH will contact the school nurse within 24 hours of receiving notification of a positive result. DPH will identify the COVID-positive staff member or student and work with the school nurse and the positive individual to identify any close contacts that need to be quarantined. The school nurse may only disclose the name of the positive individual for the purposes of assisting with contact tracing. For instance, if a young student tests positive, he or she may need a teacher's assistance in identifying close contacts. In addition, schools should also request that parents and staff contact the school if they learn they are positive since this can expedite the implementation of appropriate infectious control actions. If the school learns of the case before hearing from DPH, it should contact the Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology within DPH at 1-888-295-5156.



## **What happens once DPH learns that a student, teacher, bus driver or other school staff member tests positive for COVID?**

Positive cases related to a school setting are considered high-priority cases for DPH, and if they are identified through initial case investigation or contact tracing, a DPH epidemiologist will begin a detailed investigation. Likewise, if the school notifies DPH of a positive case, DPH will assign a DPH epidemiologist to the case. The person who tested positive will be instructed to self-isolate for a time period that depends on when he/she developed symptoms or had the test done. A person who tests positive will be instructed to stay in touch with DPH. DPH will issue an email to the individual (or a parent/guardian for a student) when the individual is cleared to return to school. Schools should require individuals to share this documentation with the school nurse before allowing someone who tested positive to return to school.

Only close contacts of the person who tested positive will be required to quarantine. For example:

- If a teacher tests positive but has consistently worn a mask and was not closer than 6 feet for more than 15 consecutive minutes to any of his or her students, then the students do **not need** to quarantine.
- If a student tests positive and sat at a desk less than six feet apart from another student for more than 15 minutes and did not wear a mask, the student next to the positive case **does** need to quarantine.
- If a student who tested positive sat three feet apart from another student for more than 15 minutes but was wearing a mask the whole time, the student next to the positive case would **not need** to quarantine.
- We understand that there will be scenarios where, due to the nature of school activities, staff may be uncertain about whether these protocols were followed. The school nurse and COVID coordinator should always work with the assigned DPH epidemiologist, who will help the school make a determination on whether quarantine is necessary based on available information.

Also, close contacts of close contacts may not need to quarantine. For instance, a sibling in the household of a positive case should be considered a close contact and should quarantine and be tested. Close contacts of the sibling (e.g., other students in the same classroom as the sibling) do not need to quarantine unless the sibling's results come back positive, but they should self-monitor for symptoms.

A DPH epidemiologist will assist a school in running through the above scenarios. In summary, it is unlikely that an entire class will need to quarantine, or an entire school would shut down in the event of a positive case, unless social distancing and mask requirements are not adhered to.



**What is the testing protocol for close contacts of positive cases?**

The DPH epidemiologist will advise close contacts if and when they should be tested due to potential exposure. DPH will make testing available for teachers and students who may have been exposed. All Delawareans are encouraged to get tested at community testing sites, whether or not they're symptomatic or have been exposed to the virus. If there is evidence of potential widespread transmission of the disease at the school (e.g., two or more cases from different households potentially transmitted at the school), DPH will work with the school to perform widespread testing for the school community. This decision should be based on findings from an investigation by DPH and informed by current levels of community infection.

**Are parents notified about a positive test in the school?**

The school nurse, COVID coordinator, and possibly the school leader will coordinate with the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) and DPH to notify families of the presence of any positive COVID-19 cases in the classroom and/or school to raise awareness and encourage closer observation for any symptoms at home. Previously established processes for communication to stakeholders regarding other contagious diseases that impact schools should be followed, including protecting the identity of those who test positive.

**Are there special cleaning protocols schools must follow after a positive case?**

If a positive case is connected to an individual office or other space that can be left vacant for up to 24 hours, this is best and will allow the viral load to reduce before cleaning and disinfection take place. If the positive case is associated with a classroom or other essential space, regular disinfection and cleaning should take place before the next school day. If enhanced cleaning has been taking place, then those procedures should be continued, and additional or specific cleaning should not be necessary. Enhanced cleaning will reduce risk and should be continued. Commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, railings, etc.) should be cleaned every 15 minutes to 2 hours. It is vital that an EPA-approved disinfectant, or prepared bleach solution, be used to ensure effectiveness against COVID-19. CDC and EPA have guidance for cleaning and [disinfecting schools](#) and a [simple decision tool for assistance](#).