

# CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19: QUARANTINE FAQs FOR OKLAHOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS DECEMBER 7, 2020

While the planned distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is reason for optimism, a current and alarming spike in coronavirus cases means Oklahomans must step up vigilance. Cautionary actions recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – especially wearing a mask around others, watching your social distancing, washing your hands and avoiding crowds – effectively reduce viral transmission, which in turn helps keep schools operating and students learning.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) and Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) have collaborated to offer the following FAQs regarding new guidelines involving quarantine, isolation and related matters.

Questions? For program- or department-specific questions, please contact the relevant OSDE office directly. For legal questions, contact Brad Clark, General Counsel, at 405-521-4906, or Marley Billingsley, Legal Assistant, at 405-521-4889. Other questions may be directed to Annette Price, Constituent Services Specialist, at 405-521-6647.

## **1. What is a requirement to isolate and how does that differ from a quarantine requirement?**

Isolation separates those who have been infected with the virus (tested positive) away from others.

Quarantine is used to separate someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine is critical to control transmission, especially by infected individuals who might unknowingly transmit infection to others.

## **2. Who determines requirements for isolation and quarantine in Oklahoma?**

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH), through its Commissioner, is charged with the duty to control and prevent the spread of communicable disease under 63 O.S. § 1-106. This power and authority includes imposing quarantine or isolation upon any individual suspected or confirmed to be incubating a communicable disease. 63 O.S. § 1-504. The OSDH, or local public health official at a county health department, will determine the terms and conditions of the quarantine or isolation. Such terms and conditions include, but are not limited to, the length of the quarantine or isolation period.

If OSDH recommends or advises a quarantine or isolation period for any individual, and has reasonable belief that the individual is for any reason not complying with the recommendation, OSDH can issue a quarantine or isolation order upon the individual. This includes any noncompliance due to a conflicting recommendation from a non-OSDH physician. Any violation of the terms and conditions of an order for quarantine or isolation is a violation of law. An individual who violates an order may be subject to detainment by law enforcement for the period of quarantine or isolation and/or criminal penalties including the conviction of a misdemeanor and/or a fine.

**3. Does the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also set requirements for isolation and quarantine?**

No. According to the [CDC](#), local public health authorities set quarantine requirements for their jurisdiction. This is consistent with the aforementioned Oklahoma statute. See Question 1. However, the CDC does establish guidelines and provide resources to local jurisdictions. To date, OSDH has generally adopted the CDC's options for isolation and quarantine requirements.

**4. Does a school district determine who must quarantine or isolate, or the duration of that period?**

No. School districts are obligated by law to respect and cooperate with the orders of health officials in such matters. For additional information, see Question 2, above.

**5. Is a school district required to notify health officials of positive cases and exposures in the school?**

Yes. Oklahoma law requires school districts to immediately notify the local/county health department of known positive cases and exposures in school. 63 O.S. § 6303(B). To accomplish this, OSDH and OSDE have partnered to establish a uniform reporting mechanism for schools, accessible to authorized school and health officials through Single Sign-On.

**6. What are the requirements for isolation, and have those recently changed?**

The isolation period is a minimum of 10 days from the date symptoms started or, for those with no symptoms, from the date of a positive COVID-19 test. Those with symptoms may need to isolate for longer than 10 days. Symptomatic individuals should remain in isolation until 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, at least 24 hours with no fever without fever-reducing medication, and until other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

**7. If a student has tested positive for COVID-19, can the student come to school or participate in any way in in-person school activities during their isolation period?**

No. This individual must adhere to isolation requirements (see Question 6, above) and not attend school until the expiration of that time. Existing law provides that anyone with a communicable disease is prohibited from attending a private or public school, and Oklahoma State Department of Health rules acknowledge that an important part of a school health program is the prevention and control of communicable diseases. It is the duty of the parent or guardian, and the school, to exclude such person until the period of isolation ordered for the case expires, or until permission has been given by state or local health officers.

See 63 O.S. § 1-507.

**8. What are Oklahoma’s requirements for quarantine?**

According to [OSDH](#), quarantine is established for the length of the incubation period of the communicable disease, which is the span of time during which people may develop illness after an exposure. The CDC and OSDH recommend someone who has been exposed to COVID-19 to quarantine for a period of 14 days. This quarantine period begins on the day of the last close contact with COVID-19, and ends 14 days after that date.

On Dec. 2, 2020, the [CDC](#) modified its recommended quarantine guidance. Included in the modified guidelines are two additional options relating to quarantine:

- a. Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing and if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring, as long as no symptoms consistent with COVID develop, and the person wears a face covering in public until at least 14 days after exposure.
- b. Quarantine can end after Day 7 if the individual has received a negative test and has not had symptoms during the quarantine period, as long as no symptoms consistent with COVID develop, and the person wears a face covering in public until at least 14 days after exposure. The test may be a PCR or antigen detection test, but must be taken within 48 hours of the end of Day 7. Under no circumstances can quarantine be discontinued earlier than the end of Day 7.
- c. Under either scenario, continued symptom monitoring and the wearing of masks *must* be met.

After stopping quarantine, the CDC advises:

- a. Watch for symptoms until 14 days after exposure.
- b. If symptoms present, immediately self-isolate and contact the local public health authority or a healthcare provider.
- c. Wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, wash hands, avoid crowds and take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**9. Has OSDH adopted the CDC options made available on December 2?**

Yes. While OSDH continues to recommend the quarantine period be 14 days from the date of exposure, the quarantine requirement is that provided by CDC on Dec. 2, 2020.

**10. Can a district retain a 14-day quarantine?**

Yes. The CDC and OSDH still recommend a 14-day quarantine as the safest way to guard against viral transmission.

**11. Are there other options available for school districts to consider relating to quarantine of students?**

Generally, no. However, on Nov. 30, 2020, the Oklahoma State Department of Health adopted a short-term, interim policy that may allow school districts to offer in-school quarantine. This short-term authorization is set to expire on Dec. 23, 2020, and may only be available for students identified as close contacts based on an in-school exposure and only if the school district meets and maintains strict adherence to the requirements of the OSDH interim policy.

**As an initial requirement, school districts considering this limited option must consult with their county health department in determining if the district is able to meet all guidelines. The guidelines and requirements are as follows:**

- a. Availability of facilities that will permit housing of quarantined students in a socially distanced environment, and away from contact with non-quarantined students and staff. Examples could include (but not limited to) a gymnasium, auditorium, or cafeteria. The area must be dedicated exclusively to the housing of quarantined students during school hours. Use of the facility outside of school hours should be limited and follow thorough cleaning.
- b. Quarantined students shall remain in the space at all times during the school day except for breaks for restroom and outside time.
- c. Quarantined students will maintain social distancing of *at least* 6 feet within the quarantine space (with greater distance strongly encouraged).
- d. Quarantined students will be required to wear masks at all times except when eating.
- e. Quarantined students will be tested repeatedly (at least on days 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 of quarantine, but more frequently if schools choose), using the Binax Now rapid diagnostic test. Schools can choose to do follow-up testing after release from quarantine, as well (days, 10, 12 and 14, for example).
  1. Tests will be provided to the schools by the OSDH.
  2. Schools must have a CLIA-waiver number and appropriately trained personnel to collect, perform and interpret the test. (A Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment waiver allows school districts to conduct testing and requires reporting of results.)



3. Schools must report results of the tests to the Oklahoma State Department of Health daily.
4. Any student who tests positive for COVID-19 (either at school or a different test performed by another qualified testing facility) shall immediately enter isolation and is no longer permitted in the in-school quarantine program.
- f. Students in the in-school quarantine program are not permitted to participate in extracurricular activities; ride buses to or from school; attend after-school events; or be in any other situations where contact with non-quarantined persons is likely.
- g. Schools must be able to provide personnel to supervise students in quarantine. This supervision is not intended or expected to include instruction; students will be engaged in distance learning. However, it will require appropriate adult supervision to ensure any student who becomes ill can receive appropriate care.
- h. Schools need to provide an opportunity for students to get outside multiple times a day. This time should not permit interaction among quarantined students, as social distancing is still required. However, it should allow for unmasked time and some degree of individual physical activity.
- i. Parents of quarantined students must be informed of the requirements of the program, and sign an agreement for their student to attend.

A checklist from OSDH can be downloaded [here](#).

## **12. To summarize, what are the options for districts to consider for quarantine policies?**

- a. Strongly recommended 14-day quarantine for students and staff who are identified as close contacts;
- b. Required minimum quarantine period of:
  1. 10 days, ending if no symptoms have been present during Days 1-10. No test required to return after Day 10, or
  2. 7 days, ending after Day 7 if the individual has a negative test no more than 48 hours prior to the end of quarantine and has not had any symptoms during Days 1-7.
  3. Under scenario a and b, wearing of masks and symptom monitoring must be met at all times.
- c. Until Dec. 23, in-school quarantine pursuant to OSDH's interim policy and requirements identified in Question 11.

**13. Under previous quarantine guidelines, someone quarantined because of a household member with COVID was required to quarantine during the household member’s 10-day isolation period as well as another 14 days for quarantine. How does this change under the new guidelines?**

An individual exposed to someone with COVID must quarantine for 14 days (or 7 or 10 days, see Question 8) from the date of last exposure. If the exposure is from an infected household member and the infected person is not able to isolate away from other household members, the date of last exposure will be the last day of the infected person’s isolation period. In this scenario, the quarantine period for the household member will begin on the last day of the infected person’s isolation period.



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