



Guidance and Criteria to Waive Traditional Quarantine in K-12 Students from Your Local Health Department



Quarantine is used to keep someone who was likely exposed to COVID-19 away from others to prevent the spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are infected with the virus. It is a powerful public health tool to stop the spread of infectious diseases. However, it can impose personal burdens that may affect physical and mental health and cause other burdens.

This document is meant as a resource to minimize the disruption to in-school learning due to quarantine. The definition of close contact will not change, rather an alternative approach to traditional quarantine* is offered. This decision-making process is based on risk of infection in educational settings properly using COVID-19 mitigation measures. Though at lower risk, students that are close contacts to COVID-19 are still at a risk for infection and transmission of infection. Therefore, if these students continue to attend school, the school staff and school community must be aware that less strict measures are being followed.

The definition of a close contact was developed by the CDC based on an understanding of aerosol and droplet transmission of SARS-COV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The definition is independent of the steps taken for quarantine and remains the same.

A CLOSE CONTACT to COVID-19 IS:

Someone who has been within 6 feet of an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. An infected person can spread COVID-19 starting from 2 days before they have any [symptoms](#) (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days before the positive specimen collection date), until they meet criteria for [discontinuing home isolation](#). Others considered as close contacts are those that provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19, have had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them), have shared eating or drinking utensils, or have been sneezed, coughed, or somehow gotten the infected person's respiratory droplets on them.

The following people with recent exposure do NOT need to quarantine:

- People who have been fully vaccinated (two or more weeks past the final dose in a COVID-19 vaccination series)
- People who were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last three months

CRITERIA TO WAIVE TRADITIONAL QUARANTINE as recommended from your local health department:

If a K-12 student meets the definition of a close contact to COVID-19 as described above, and

- their exposure occurred only in a classroom or bus AND**
- both the index case (person infected with COVID-19) and the close contact were properly masked AND**
- both were always at a distance of at least three feet apart from each other AND**
- appropriate mitigation measures have been followed (for [classroom](#) or [bus](#))**
- the student may continue to attend school instead of being placed into traditional quarantine.**

- The school still needs to notify the parent** that their child was a close contact to an individual with COVID-19.
 - The parent/guardian should be allowed to keep their child home in quarantine if they desire.
 - The parent/guardian should be advised they may still be contacted by public health (either the state program, Traceforce, or the local health department) for close contact monitoring.
 - The parent/guardian should be educated that, even though the student can attend school, they were exposure to COVID-19 and
 - should limit the child’s social activities outside of school for 10 to 14 days.
 - may wish to consider their student’s exposure before their student visits anyone who may be at risk for complications from COVID-19 infection.
 - should consider having their student tested for COVID-19 once or twice during the 10 to 14 days after their exposure.
- The parent should be advised to closely monitor their child for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days after their last exposure and, should symptoms develop, keep them home and notify the school or local health department as soon as possible.
- Schools must continue to report all identified close contacts to the local health department.
- Schools must report students that become symptomatic to the local health department.
- If a student has had multiple exposures to a contagious individual (such as in the classroom plus at lunch, gym, etc.) the highest risk exposure should be considered.
- If it is unknown if exposures occurred outside of the classroom or bus, or if proper mitigation measure were not in use, then traditional quarantine should be used.
- Students within 3 feet of an index case should be place in traditional quarantine.
- Students identified as close contacts that develop symptoms and/or test positive should be placed in isolation and the local health department must be notified.
- If a student that meets the criteria for waived traditional quarantine as described above, *and* they are currently home in traditional quarantine, *and* they have not tested positive for COVID-19 or exhibited ANY symptoms for COVID-19, they can be allowed to return to school if desired by the school.

If an additional case or cases develop in the classroom or if local public health has identified ongoing transmission within the school, the local health department may determine that traditional quarantine should be put into place for all contacts (including those that have previously had quarantine waived).

To waive full quarantine in select students, the school must have strong [mitigation measures](#) in place including masking and social distancing. Additionally, on a bus, [appropriate mitigation measure](#) for busing must be in place.

If schools choose to use the option of waiving full quarantine, it is important that schools clearly communicate with their school community that traditional quarantine is not being employed as it is associated with a small but real increased risk of COVID-19 infections in the school.

Schools are not required to follow this option of waiving full quarantine: this is an option provided by your local health department. Schools are also allowed to stop following this option and return to universal traditional quarantine should levels of community transmission increase concerningly or excessive cases or outbreaks occur in the school. The use of this approach can be considered in consultation with the local health department.

*Traditional quarantine currently is 10 to 14 days. The gold standard and safest length of quarantine for preventing COVID-19 transmission is 14 days. Your local health department does allow for asymptomatic individuals to be released from quarantine at 10 days, with continued monitoring for symptoms days 11-14. The local health department does not recommend or support any quarantine strategy that is less than 10 days even if it includes testing. Quarantine less than 10 days misses an unacceptable number of infected individuals and, with the predominance of highly contagious variants with higher transmissibility in our areas, this is not acceptable. These variants were not of great concern in the United States when the CDC developed this optional method in November 2020.

References:

- Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention - Updated Apr. 23, 2021
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- Science Brief: Options to Reduce Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>
- Zimmerman KO, Akinboyo IC, Brookhart A, et al. Incidence and Secondary Transmission of SARS2 CoV-2 Infections in Schools. *Pediatrics*. 2021;e2020048090. Published online ahead of print 2021 January 8. doi:10.1542/peds.2020-048090
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