

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**This is a voluntary opt-in program.** If we do not receive the signed consent forms, your child will not be allowed to test in a pool or individually for the follow up should there be a positive pool result.

**Do families need to complete consent forms each week a pooled test is conducted?**

No. Staff and parent/guardian consent forms only need to be completed once a year for participation in the program. These forms must provide consent to participate in pooled testing consent for any necessary follow up tests, including administering and reporting Abbott BinaxNOW tests.

**Who does the testing of my child?** The student does the swabbing of their nostrils independently, under the direction and supervision of a school staff member. If a student grade cannot effectively swab themselves (such as Pre-K to Grade 1), a licensed healthcare professional or school nurse can swab the child.

**What frequency are recommended?** Pool testing should be done on individuals once per week.

**How long will it take to receive pooled test results?** In almost all cases, it will take 24-48 hours to received pooled test results. As a reminder, staff and students do not need to quarantine while awaiting pooled test results and should be in school unless they become symptomatic.

**How will I find out about the test results?** Medical information is protected by privacy rights, and RSU 2 and the testing company and labs will follow those privacy laws. When a positive test in a pool is received, each participant in the pool will be tested individually the next day. Once a positive test is connected to an individual test, the parents of that student will be notified and the school will follow the contact tracing steps similar to the way this has been done in the 20-21 school year.

**Is pooled testing an effective strategy in areas with low transmission rates?** Yes. Pooled testing is an effective strategy in areas with low transmission. With lower COVID-19 rates, there may be fewer follow-up tests. This can increase staff and community confidence in returning to school while incurring much lower costs than individual testing.

**Is pooled testing an effective strategy in areas where COVID prevalence is high?** Yes. Pooled testing is an effective tool to identify positive cases without the logistical and financial burden of regular individual testing. In communities with high COVID prevalence, which is defined for schools in Maine as color coded yellow or red, it is strongly suggested that SAUs start with pools smaller than 10 to minimize the number of positive pools returned.

**Should vaccinated staff participate in pooled testing?** We encourage teachers and staff to participate in the testing even if they have already been fully vaccinated, though it is not required. There are several reasons why vaccinated staff should participate in pooled testing, including:

- While each vaccine authorized by the FDA is effective at preventing symptomatic infection, no vaccine is 100% effective. Vaccinated individuals may still get COVID-19 and transmit it to others.
- Evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and potentially less likely to transmit SARS-CoV-2 to others, but further investigation is ongoing.
- Teachers can model good practices for students to encourage participation.

**If a fully vaccinated individual is part of a positive pool, do they need to have a negative test before returning to school/work?**

No. As with all individuals in a positive pool, a fully vaccinated individual who is part of a positive pool should follow DHHS/DOE's recommended protocols, which includes receiving a follow up/reflex test (either BinaxNOW) but it is not necessary for that person to stay out of work (i.e., quarantine) before taking the follow up test.

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### **Do students and staff need to quarantine until the pool test results are returned?**

Pooled testing provides surveillance testing capabilities to schools, meaning that students and staff participating in the pooled PCR testing program do not have to quarantine if they have been identified as a close contact. These individuals should remain in school and continue to participate in the weekly pooled PCR testing program. However, any unvaccinated student or staff member not participating in pooled PCR testing Program or unwilling to get follow-up BinaxNOW testing as part of a positive pool and identified as a close contact of a confirmed case will need to quarantine for 10 days.

**Do individuals in a positive pool need to quarantine while they are waiting for individual-level results to return?** No. Students who are part of a positive pool do not need to quarantine while they await their follow up test results, unless they are symptomatic. It is possible that individuals that had COVID-19 (knowingly or unknowingly) but are no longer contagious will cause some pooled tests to come back positive, and every test has a chance of false positives. Symptomatic students should not attend school and follow the school's procedure. If not symptomatic, individuals in a positive pool will return to school for follow-up testing. Individuals who receive positive follow-up individual test results will need to be isolated as defined in the Standard Operating Procedure Investigating Positive Cases for COVID-19 in Schools.

**Can tests be given at home?** At this time, the pooled testing options associated with this initiative cannot be conducted at home. Pooled tests should occur in school and be administered or supervised by trained staff.

### **What are the options if BinaxNOW tests for positive pool members are all negative?**

All negative BinaxNOW tests likely indicate an individual of lower viral load that is less likely to be infectious. If this occurs, schools will conduct a second BinaxNOW test on all individuals no sooner than the next day, but within 2 days. If those tests are all negative, then the school would proceed with the next round of scheduled pooled PCR testing.

**Should household members of individuals in a positive pool be considered “possibly exposed” while waiting for follow-up testing to be completed?** No. Members of a positive pool do not have to quarantine prior to receiving the results of their follow-up tests, unless they are symptomatic. Similarly, household contacts of individuals in a positive pool do not need to quarantine, unless the individual is confirmed to have COVID-19 through follow-up testing. Individuals or close contacts of individuals who do receive a positive follow-up test result should follow the Standard Operating Procedure Investigating Positive Cases for COVID-19 in Schools.