

Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and Department of Public Health

Frequently Asked Questions, Week of November 15th

1. What should we do if a school in our district is experiencing a concerning increase in COVID-19 cases?

If a school has concerns over a spike in cases within a classroom, grade, or a school, **districts and schools must notify their local board of health and must call** the DESE Rapid Response Help Center at 781-338-3500.

DESE will then support the district/school with the following steps:

- Follow [DESE/DPH testing and quarantine protocols](#), including implementation of Test and Stay for close contacts
- Narrow the focus to relevant classrooms and/or grades where the case increases have been observed
- Work with DESE, local board of health, and DPH epidemiologists to review and assess the most recent testing results, discuss strategies to control the spread, and determine additional measures to be taken. This could include the following:
 - Review close contacts and potentially expand participants in Test and Stay
 - Administer enhanced testing
 - Quarantine an individual classroom and/or grade
 - **Please note: If quarantine of a classroom or grade is necessary, based on the advice of DPH, [quarantine length for asymptomatic individuals is 7 days with a negative test result](#).** Individuals must receive a BinaxNOW or PCR test no earlier than Day 5 to return to school on Day 8.
- If cases begin to increase in other classrooms or grades, additional testing may again be implemented. DESE, the local board of health, and DPH epidemiologist will continue to advise if quarantining other areas of the school is advisable.
 - Districts must work with DESE prior to making any decisions about quarantining and closure of an entire classroom, grade, or school.

2. Now that children ages 5-11 are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, are there any changes in testing and quarantine protocols for these students?

Once children ages 5-11 have been fully vaccinated (i.e., 2 weeks following their second vaccine dose), if they are subsequently identified as a close contact and are asymptomatic, they will be exempt from testing and quarantine protocols (including Test and Stay). Vaccinated children who are not close contacts also have a modified list of symptoms to be monitored for, and should follow testing and quarantine response protocols if they are experiencing any of the following: fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills; difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; new loss of taste or smell; or muscle aches or body aches. These individuals may also seek clinical guidance to assess the need for PCR testing if they have other possible symptoms of COVID-19. For more information see page 3 of the [DESE/DPH testing and quarantine protocols](#).