

# DESEDPH Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios - SY 2021-22 updated 12/30/21

## Section 1: Key definitions

This section outlines the list of COVID-19 symptoms, provides the definition of a close contact, and outlines situations where close contacts are exempt from COVID-19 testing and quarantine response protocols including isolation, quarantine, and Test and Stay.

### COVID-19 symptoms

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves.<sup>1 2</sup>

Unvaccinated individuals and any close contacts presenting these symptoms should follow testing and quarantine response protocols as outlined in Section 2 of this document.

Vaccinated individuals who are not close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols if they are experiencing symptoms in bold. These individuals may also seek clinical guidance to assess the need for PCR testing if they have other symptoms on this list.

---

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts DPH, [Testing of Persons with Suspect COVID-19](#), (2020, May 13).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

## **COVID-19 symptoms list:**

- **Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills**
- **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
- **New loss of taste or smell**
- **Muscle aches or body aches**
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Sore throat, *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Fatigue, *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms*

## **Definition of a close contact**

Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period.<sup>3 4</sup> Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated.

In general, close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols in Section 2 of this document. **However, certain close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols as noted below.**

## **Close contacts who are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols**

### **The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:**

- **Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated<sup>5</sup> close contacts:** Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Classroom close contacts:** An individual who is exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom while both individuals were masked, so long as the individuals were spaced at least 3 feet apart, is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.

---

<sup>3</sup> Note: To be a close contact, the 15 minutes must occur within a 24-hour period. Multiple brief or transitory interactions (less than a minute) throughout the day are unlikely to result in 15 minutes of cumulative contact and do not meet the definition of close contact.

<sup>4</sup> CDC definition of Close Contact. Available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>.

<sup>5</sup> At this time, fully vaccinated is defined as two-weeks following the completion of the Pfizer or Moderna series or two-weeks following a single dose of Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine.

- **Bus close contacts:** Individuals on buses must be masked according to federal requirements. As such, individuals who are masked on buses when windows are open are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days:** An individual who has been previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and then becomes a close contact of someone with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols if:
  - The exposure occurred within 90 days of the onset of their own illness AND
  - The exposed individual is recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms.

## Section 2: Recommended testing and quarantine response protocols

This section outlines testing and quarantine response protocols for individuals – students and staff – who test positive for COVID-19, close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols, and symptomatic individuals. Each scenario outlines the duration of any recommended quarantine or isolation, the conditions to be met in order for the individual to return to school, and any additional considerations.

### Overview of Protocol Categories:

- Protocol A: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19
- Protocol B: Protocol for asymptomatic close contacts
- Protocol C: Protocol for symptomatic individuals

### Protocol A: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19

#### Protocol A for individuals who test positive

- **Duration:** Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases is a minimum of **5** days after symptom onset or after positive PCR or antigen test, if asymptomatic.
- **Return to school:** After **5** days<sup>6</sup> and once they have:
  - Been without fever for 24 hours (and without taking fever-reducing medications); and,
  - Experienced improvement in other symptoms.
  - **Following the 5-day isolation period, individuals must mask for 5 additional days when around others. Individuals who are unable to mask should follow the information provided in the [FAQ](#) released on October 12, 2021.**
- **Note:** Return to school should be based on time and symptom resolution. **Even with a 5-day isolation period, repeat viral testing prior to return is not recommended.**

<sup>6</sup> If an individual tests positive as part of a group pooled test, the **5**-day period begins the day the group pooled test returned a positive result.

## Protocol B: Protocol for asymptomatic close contacts

Close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols and are asymptomatic follow the guidelines in Protocol B below. Please recall that all asymptomatic, fully vaccinated individuals are exempt from close contact testing and quarantine response protocols and therefore do not need to follow Protocol B. However, fully vaccinated individuals are expected to monitor for symptoms and stay home and get tested if they experience symptoms, in alignment with statewide guidance<sup>7</sup> and Protocol C.

Note: In some cases, individuals may be asked to follow specific testing and quarantine response protocols (including durations for quarantine/isolation) provided by contact tracers or local health officials which may differ from the recommended protocols below.

### **Protocol B for asymptomatic close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols**

Districts who participate in the statewide COVID-19 testing program or another similar testing program are strongly encouraged to utilize the new Test and Stay (B-1) protocol option to minimize the amount of time individuals are out of school. This testing and quarantine response protocol has been shown to be generally equivalent to quarantine for school-based contacts, and a safe alternative to at-home isolation.<sup>8</sup> If schools choose not to participate in the statewide COVID-19 testing program and do not participate in a similar testing initiative, unvaccinated individuals follow the traditional quarantine (B-2) protocol.

Individuals who are part of the Test and Stay protocols may be eligible to participate in school sports and extracurricular activities, provided that they are in compliance with the applicable protocol. For events and sports that take place on non-school days, testing will still be required on those days to participate.

As part of Test and Stay, quarantine is still strongly recommended for individuals outside of school settings.

### **Protocol B-1 (Recommended): Test and Stay**

- **Duration of Test and Stay:** 5 days from the date of exposure
- **Return to School:** Close contacts can remain in school and do not have to quarantine, as long as they:
  - Are asymptomatic

<sup>7</sup> Guidance for People who are Fully Vaccinated Against COVID-19. Massachusetts DPH; August 2, 2021. Available at: <https://www.mass.gov/guidance/guidance-for-people-who-are-fully-vaccinated-against-covid-19>

<sup>8</sup> Bernadette C Young, David W Eyre, Saroj Kendrick, Chris White, Sylvester Smith, et. al. "A cluster randomized trial of the impact of a policy of daily testing for contacts of COVID-19 cases on attendance and COVID-19 transmission in English secondary schools and colleges." (July 2021). medRxiv. Available at: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.07.23.21260992v1>

- o Wear masks in school at all times, other than when eating or drinking. When these individuals cannot be masked (i.e., when eating or drinking) they should maintain 3 feet of distance from other individuals to the extent feasible.
- o Take a rapid antigen test (e.g., BinaxNOW) on each school day and receive a negative result. When the 5 days from date of exposure includes weekends or holidays, individuals should quarantine on weekends, and if they remain asymptomatic, upon return to school to school be tested immediately. If the individual remains negative, they can stay in school.
- o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 10, and self-isolate at home if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or develops symptoms during the Test and Stay period or the 10 days following initial exposure, they should follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they should follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

**Protocol B-2: Traditional protocol (if school does not have access to rapid daily testing or family or adult individual chooses not to participate in Test and Stay)**

- **Duration:** Quarantine is at least 5 days from the date of exposure
- **Return to School:** After 5 days, returning on day 6, provided that they:
  - o Remain asymptomatic, and
  - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 10, self-isolate if symptoms develop, and adhere to strict mask use for an additional 5 days.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or within the 5 days following initial exposure, they follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A). For all those exposed, best practice would also include an antigen or PCR test for COVID-19 at day 5 after exposure. An antigen test may be self-administered and does not need to be proctored or performed by a healthcare professional.

**Protocol B-3 is deleted.**

**Protocol C: Protocol for symptomatic individuals**

Protocol C applies to **vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals** who experience the COVID-19 symptoms listed in Section 1 applicable to their status **and who have not tested positive for COVID-19.**

**Protocol C for symptomatic individuals:**

**Protocol C-1 (Recommended): Return to school post-symptoms with test**

- **Duration:** Dependent on symptom resolution
- **Return to School:** Individuals may return to school after they:
  - Have received a negative PCR or antigen test result for COVID-19. An antigen test may be self-administered and does not need to be proctored or performed by a healthcare professional. Note: So long as the individual is not a close contact, if a medical professional makes an alternative diagnosis for the COVID-19-like symptoms, the individual may use this recommendation (e.g., for influenza or strep pharyngitis) in lieu of a PCR test or antigen test.
  - Have improvement in symptoms
  - Have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- **Note: If the symptomatic individual was a close contact who is not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols, after symptoms resolve and they receive a negative PCR test, they should follow Protocol B-1 for Test and Stay.**
  - If Test and Stay is not available or the family or adult individual opts not to participate, they follow Protocol B-2.

**Protocol C-2: Alternative protocol for symptomatic individuals who are not close contacts and choose not to receive a COVID test to return to school**

- **Duration:** Isolation is at least 5 days from symptom onset.<sup>9</sup>
- **Return to School:** After 5 days, returning on day 6, assuming they:
  - Have improvement in symptoms
  - Have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

For Frequently Asked Questions please see the [FAQ section](#) on the DESE website.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html>