

Smithfield Public Schools

Test to Stay Program

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Test to Stay Program (TTS)?

TTS is a new quarantine protocol being offered in Rhode Island schools, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). TTS aims to provide students with an option to stay in school after being identified as a close contact and supporting them to gain the intellectual and psychosocial benefits of in-person learning. The TTS concept is based on data that show that schools are safe due to layered prevention strategies and that most students who test positive for COVID-19 get infected from exposure in settings not related to school. The protocol allows students and staff who don't have symptoms when identified as a close contact to take daily tests instead of quarantine at home.

2. I thought students and staff could already test out of quarantine?

According to Executive Order 21-105, students and staff who don't have symptoms can shorten the quarantine period to 7 days (from 10) if they get a negative result from a lab-processed PCR test taken at least 5 days after the exposure. In this case, the person would be required to stay home for 7 days, returning to school and activities on the eighth day.

3. How is TTS different from the current close contact quarantine protocol?

In TTS, students and staff who have been exposed to COVID-19 while in school or a school-related activity and don't have symptoms may choose to get tested at school daily for seven days after they were exposed. **They must quarantine at home when not in school.** Each day, if a student or staff gets a negative test result, then they may stay in person for class. If they get a positive test result, then they will need to return home and isolate for 10 days.

4. How will TTS work day to day?

Students who have consented will be advised to start the TTS quarantine protocol if they are identified as a close contact of someone at school. During their seven-day quarantine period, **students must be transported to school and cannot ride the bus to school.** A parent or guardian must remain within 5 minutes of the school until the testing process is complete to ensure transportation is available should the child test positive and need to be dismissed. Once they arrive at school each day, they'll come to the designated TTS location and wait for testing. The tests that will be used are rapid antigen tests which take about 15 minutes to process. Students and staff who get negative test results will be allowed to go to class. Students and staff who get positive test results will be directed to get a PCR test immediately and to isolate pending the result of the PCR test, which takes 24-48 hours. If the PCR test comes back positive, the person will continue to isolate and follow all protocols for individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. If the PCR test comes back negative, the person will be released from isolation and allowed to return to school.

5. If a student or staff is notified that they're a close contact during the school day, do they need to get tested that same day?

No. If students are notified that they're close contacts during a school day, they will begin their seven days of antigen testing on the next school day.

6. If families choose to opt in to TTS, are their children still required to quarantine outside of school if they are identified as a close contact?

Yes. Students and staff who are close contacts from a school-related exposure must still quarantine when not attending school and may not participate in non-school activities. This practice will help stop the spread of the virus in the community while still allowing students to learn in person.

7. Is TTS for students and staff?

Yes. Both students and staff are eligible for this program.

8. Will families need to provide an insurance card or pay for the tests?

No. The tests are being provided to schools by the State. Although families must give consent for testing, they will not be asked for insurance or billing information.

9. Will teachers need to track the students in their classes?

Each school will be responsible for designating staff to manage all aspects of the TTS program including identifying close contacts, testing, and tracking students who are being tested daily.

10. How will this impact the spread of the virus?

RIDOH has been tracking cases for more than 18 months. Based on the data collected, they have concluded that the risk of exposure at school is fairly low due to use and enforcement of protection strategies, like masking, distancing, and symptom screening. TTS aims to identify positive cases and ensure that asymptomatic students and staff who test negative are able to continue learning in school.

11. If my child has to quarantine because someone in our household has tested positive for COVID-19, can they participate in TTS?

No, TTS is only for students and staff who are identified as close contacts due to school-related exposure, not those who have been exposed in a home, community, or other out-of-school setting.

12. Can students participating in TTS take the bus to school?

No. Students participating in TTS are not permitted to take the bus to school. Once they have tested negative, they may take the bus home.. Students must wear a mask and sit in their assigned seat while riding the bus.

13. Can students participating in TTS attend before or after-school child care sponsored by the school?

Yes. Students participating in TTS are permitted to attend before or after-school child care sponsored by the school. As students must continue to follow quarantine guidelines outside of school, students are not permitted to attend private child care during their quarantine period.

14. Can students and staff participate in extracurricular activities when in TTS?

Students and staff who remain asymptomatic and test negative may attend school-related extracurricular activities. However, they must continue to follow quarantine guidelines outside of school and shall not attend non-school related activities during their quarantine period.

15. Can students and staff get tested outside of school for TTS?

No. Students and staff must be tested at school to participate in TTS.

16. What if a student or staff in TTS starts having symptoms of COVID-19?

Any student or staff who isn't feeling well must follow existing school sick policies and stay home until they've completed the testing and isolation requirements for symptoms of COVID-19.

17. If the school is participating in TTS, can we go back to the way things were before COVID-19?

No. The purpose of TTS is to ensure that students can attend in-person learning as much as possible. This program reduces the number of instructional days missed because it allows students to remain at school, as long as they do not have symptoms of COVID-19, and get negative test results every day during their seven-day quarantine period. TTS is not a substitute for other safety and mitigation practices used in schools. To ensure student and staff safety, we will still need to ensure proper mask wearing and distancing, screen for symptoms daily, keep students in cohorts, improve ventilation, maintain seating charts, and track student movement throughout the building for contact tracing purposes.

18. What if a family decides not to participate in TTS right now, but then changes their minds at a later time?

Students and staff can opt into the Test to Stay program at any time by completing the district consent form.

19. What if students and staff participating in TTS are late to school?

School staff are responsible for ensuring that students and staff participating in the TTS and identified as close contacts get tested before proceeding to class. If a student or staff member is late to school, the school will have a process for verifying their participation in TTS upon arrival and ensuring they get tested. There will be a testing window at each school. Once that time passes, testing will be closed and the student will not be able to stay in school for that day.

20. What happens if a student or staff is absent and misses one of their days of testing?

Only asymptomatic students and staff are eligible to participate in TTS. If a student or staff member is asymptomatic and is absent from school, they will continue daily testing when they return to school the following day.

If a student or staff member is symptomatic and is absent from school due to this reason, they should stay home, isolate, and get tested for COVID-19. They may not resume participation in TTS if they are absent due to symptoms.

21. Why are only students and staff in Pre K through sixth grade eligible to participate in the TTS?

TTS in Rhode Island is available only to students and staff in Pre K through sixth grade because many students in these grades have not yet been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The COVID-19 vaccine has been available longer to people age 12 and older. Fully vaccinated students and staff shouldn't have to miss in-person learning if they're identified as a close contact. Fully vaccinated people don't have to quarantine unless they've got symptoms of COVID-19.