

COVID-19 and Schools Frequently Asked Questions

January 7, 2022

Updates in italics

1. What guidance and resources are available to schools for the 2021-2022 school year?

Schools will need to follow the updated California Department of Public Health (CDPH) school guidance for the 2021-2022 school year [here](#). Ventura County Public Health (VCPH) is aligning mostly with the CDPH school guidance. Any deviations from the guidance will be listed in this FAQs document. Schools can visit the [State of California Safe Schools for All Hub](#) for technical assistance, reporting concerns and the latest news on reopening schools for in-person instruction. Schools can also visit the Ventura County Recovers [website](#) for up-to-date information on school guidance.

2. What is the face covering guidance for the 2021-2022 school year?

All students are required to wear face coverings indoors unless exempted per [CDPH face mask guidance](#). Adults in K-12 school settings are required to wear face coverings when sharing indoor spaces with students. Persons who meet the criteria for face covering exemption must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it. Face coverings are optional outdoors in all K-12 school settings. Schools must develop and implement protocols to provide face coverings to students who inadvertently fail to bring a face covering to school. Schools should offer alternative educational opportunities for those students who refuse to wear face coverings while in indoor school settings. Schools must develop and implement local protocols to enforce the face covering requirements.

3. What is the physical distancing guidance for the 2021-2022 school year?

Per updated [CDPH guidance](#), recent evidence indicates that in-person instruction can occur safely without minimum physical distancing requirements when other mitigation strategies (e.g., face covering) are implemented. This is consistent with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) K-12 School Guidance](#).

4. Are schools required to do daily symptom screening for the 2021-2022 school year?

VCPH strongly encourages schools to continue with active and passive COVID-19 symptom screening. Students and staff should follow the strategy from the [CDC for Staying Home when Sick and Getting Tested](#). Students and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care. Staff and students with symptoms of COVID-19 infection should be advised to not return for in-person instruction until they have met the VCPH criteria to return to school.

5. What is considered a “fever?”

While CDPH uses 100.5°F as the threshold for a fever, VCPH will continue to use 99.5°F as a threshold for fever.

6. What is the guidance for a student who has symptoms but no known exposure to a positive case?

The [current guidance](#) advises staff members and students with symptoms of COVID-19 infection not to return for in-person instruction until they have met CDPH criteria to return to school for those with symptoms:

- No fever in the last 24 hours (without fever-reducing medications); and
- Improvement of symptoms; and
- A negative COVID-19 Antigen or PCR test OR note from doctor confirming another underlying medical condition OR note from doctor confirming another diagnosis OR at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset.

7. Are schools required to report cases of COVID-19 to the local health department?

Yes, per AB 86 (2021) and California Code Title 17, Section 2500, schools are required to report COVID-19 cases to the local public health department. *Schools can email covidschools@ventura.org with questions on reporting cases to VCPH.*

8. What is the current quarantine guidance for unvaccinated students in which the positive case AND the close contact were wearing face coverings in an indoor or outdoor school setting?

If a close contact exposure (more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period within 0-6 feet) occurs with an unvaccinated student and both the positive case and the contact were wearing face coverings in an indoor or outdoor **school setting**, the close contact may continue to attend in-person instruction if they:

- Are asymptomatic;
- Continue to wear a face covering as required; **AND**
- Undergo at least twice weekly testing during the 10-day quarantine.

This modified quarantine is only for attending in-person classroom sessions. Students who are under this modified quarantine cannot attend any extracurricular activities (e.g., school related sports, conditioning, band practice).

Students may end modified quarantine after Day 7 if a test specimen (i.e., antigen diagnostic test, PCR/molecular diagnostic test, or pooled PCR/molecular test) is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.

For the frequency of testing while in modified quarantine refer to the CDPH FAQs [here](#).

9. Can the After School Education and Safety (ASES) program and after school childcare programs be included as an instructional activity for students on modified quarantine?

Yes, the ASES program and after school childcare programs are included activities under modified quarantine for students in Ventura County. Extracurricular activities such as music and sports are not included activities in modified quarantine and therefore cannot be done during after school programs while a student is on modified quarantine.

10. What are the quarantine duration recommendations for unvaccinated close contacts in standard quarantine (i.e., students who were not wearing masks or when the infected individual was not wearing a mask during the exposure)?

- 14-day quarantine: This remains the safest and preferred option. CDC still recommends a quarantine period of 14 days based on the upper bound estimates of COVID-19 incubation period. If any symptoms develop in the next 14 days from the last exposure, the exposed person must immediately isolate, get tested and contact their healthcare provider with any questions regarding their care.

If the contact remains asymptomatic (meaning they have NOT had any symptoms), they can discontinue self-quarantine under the following conditions:

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 from the date of last exposure without testing OR
- Quarantine can end after Day 7 if a test specimen (i.e., antigen diagnostic test, PCR/molecular diagnostic test, or pooled PCR/molecular test) is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.

For the frequency of testing while in standard quarantine refer to the CDPH FAQs [here](#).

11. When is a person eligible for a COVID-19 booster?

A person is eligible for a COVID-19 booster vaccination:

- 6 months after the 2nd dose of Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines OR
- 2 months after the 1st dose of the Johnson and Johnson [J&J]/Janssen vaccine.

12. If an unvaccinated student has an exposure off school campus, would they qualify for modified quarantine?

No, they would need to follow the 7, 10, or 14 day at home quarantine options. Students only qualify for the modified quarantine if the exposure happened on school campus and masks were worn during the exposure by both the positive case and contact. Fully vaccinated asymptomatic students do not need to quarantine if they have an exposure off campus.

13. What is the quarantine guidance for staff members who have a close contact exposure to someone with COVID-19 and are unvaccinated OR fully vaccinated and booster-eligible but have not yet received their booster dose?

These staff members should follow Cal/OSHA guidance for close contact exposures found [here](#). Executive order [N-84-20](#) allows updated CDPH guidance to supersede Cal/OSHA guidance pertaining to isolation and quarantine. Current CDPH isolation and quarantine guidance can be found [here](#). For staff only:

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 if contact does not test and remains asymptomatic.
- Quarantine can end after Day 5 if a diagnostic specimen is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.
- Continue to wear a well-fitting mask around others as required per CDPH schools guidance.
- If symptoms develop, test and stay home.

Employers are not required to exclude asymptomatic employees in this category if:

- A negative diagnostic test is obtained within 3-5 days after last exposure to a case
- Employee wears a face covering around others for a total of 10 days
- Employee continues to have no symptoms.

See table 2 at the end of this document for the table version of this guidance retrieved from [Cal/OSHA](#).

14. When would a school employee who has a close contact exposure to a COVID positive individual be eligible for no quarantine?

Per [Cal/OSHA](#), employees do not need to quarantine if they:

- Test on day 5 with a negative result.
- Wear face coverings around others for 10 days after exposure, especially in indoor settings.
- If employees test positive, they must follow isolation recommendations
- If employees develop symptoms, they must be excluded pending the results of a test.

See table 3 at the end of this document for the table version of this guidance retrieved from [Cal/OSHA](#).

15. Why don't students who have a close contact exposure qualify for the new quarantine recommendations from CDPH?

The CDPH school team is considering the updated guidance as it pertains to students who are exposed to COVID-19 and will provide an update soon. Until then, students will follow current quarantine guidance for students who have a close contact exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual as written in the [CDPH schools guidance document](#).

16. How long do unvaccinated individuals need to quarantine when they live with a COVID-19 positive household member and are unable to isolate away?

Unvaccinated individuals who cannot isolate away from a COVID-19 positive household member are being re-exposed to COVID-19 every day that positive household member is in their isolation. This can cause an individual to be in quarantine for 17-20 days if they never test positive. VCPH understands this is difficult for families and will support a 14 Day quarantine if the household contact remains asymptomatic, tests on Day 10 from the first exposure to the COVID positive household member and that test is negative. Quarantine guidance for fully vaccinated students- please refer to VCPH Student Symptom Decision Tree.

17. How should schools verify vaccination status of staff and students?

Refer to the [CDC vaccine verification recommendations](#) to implement vaccination status, as well as other prevention strategies (e.g. testing, contact tracing efforts, and quarantine and isolation practices).

18. What are the current isolation requirements for COVID-19?

Students and staff diagnosed with COVID-19 need to follow [CDPH isolation guidance](#) regardless of their vaccination status. CDPH has updated this guidance recently and VCPH is aligning this the updated guidance as it pertains to individuals who test positive. See table 1 at the end of this document to view the table version of the isolation guidance retrieved from [Cal/OSHA](#).

19. What are the new testing requirements and what are the resources available to schools for testing?

Any school currently open is subject to the minimum testing requirement standards established by [Cal/OSHA](#). Screening testing can be used at a cadence of every 2 weeks or less frequently, to understand whether the settings have higher or lower rates of COVID-19 rates than the community, to guide decisions about safety, and to inform local health departments. Schools are strongly encouraged to implement screening testing. The updated CDPH testing guidance can be found [here](#). CDPH has provided resources and additional information on testing through the [COVID-19 Testing Task Force](#). The CDPH K-12 Testing Program is available to any public, private and charter K-12 schools

in California and will be free for schools. Schools can email schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov to receive support and information on the various testing strategies available to schools, help in determining which testing will be best for the school, and to enroll in a testing program.

20. Does an antigen test require confirmation with a PCR test?

CDPH has updated guidance and no longer requires an antigen test to be confirmed with a PCR. Repeat antigen testing and/or confirmatory PCR testing should be considered in individuals who receive a negative result with an antigen test but have symptoms specific for COVID-19 (such as loss of taste and smell). This guidance can be found [here](#).

21. What type of test may be used to assess a person's status during quarantine or to exit quarantine?

An FDA-approved antigen diagnostic test, PCR diagnostic test, or pooled PCR test is acceptable for evaluation of an individual's COVID-19 status during quarantine. Collection of test specimens for persons during quarantine may occur in schools, healthcare settings, or other locations supervised by school or healthcare personnel. Specimens may be processed at the point-of-care (POC) or in a laboratory. *Over-the-Counter tests are acceptable to end isolation or quarantine.*

22. What is the process for schools to follow if a student or staff member has a positive over the counter self-tests?

Schools can follow CDPH guidance for Over the Counter testing for self-tests found [here](#). VCPH encourages positive over the counter self-test results to be followed up with an antigen or PCR COVID-19 test for confirmation if available. Individuals who test positive with an over the counter self-test should follow CDPH isolation guidance.

23. How can schools verify unsupervised or unobserved self-test results?

CDPH recommends the following ways schools can verify unsupervised self-test results:

- Use a digital (app-based) platform for test verification, which often includes scanning barcodes; these are available for certain brands of self-tests.*
- Write the name and date on the test card results and send a picture of the card to the requesting entity.*
- Create an attestation form and require signature declaring that the test specimen was obtained from the individual represented on the form, include the date the specimen was collected, and that the test was processed according to the instructions provided.*

24. Do schools need to report positive self-tests to VCPH?

Yes, schools can report home tests to VCPH through the Qualtrics case reporting link. Please email covidschools@ventura.org for questions about reporting to VCPH through Qualtrics.

25. At what point would a school have to close completely?

Individual school closure is recommended based on the number of cases, the percentage of the teacher/students/staff that are positive for COVID-19 and following consultation with the Health Officer. Individual school closure may be appropriate when there are multiple cases in multiple classrooms or stable groups at a school or when the total is 5% of the total number of teachers/students/staff are cases within a 14-day period, depending on the size and physical layout of the school. The Local Health Officer may also determine school closure is warranted for other reasons, including results from a public health investigation or other local epidemiological data.

26. What are the criteria for closing a school district?

A superintendent may close a school district if 25% or more of schools in a district have closed due to COVID-19 within 14 days, and in consultation with VCPH. Districts may typically reopen after 14 days.

27. How do schools determine when to shut down a classroom due to multiple positive COVID cases?

Schools should consult with VCPH about any concerns they have with multiple COVID cases in a classroom. VCPH will need to do in depth case and outbreak investigation before requiring a classroom to shut down. Schools may close a classroom at anytime they feel it would be best to do so without authorization from VCPH.

28. What guidance should schools follow for sports and other school-based extracurricular activities?

The November 24 update to the CDPH K-12 school guidance continues to require masks indoors for participants in school-based extracurricular activities, but allows for no masking for indoor sports and band instrument playing with weekly testing under certain circumstances. Specifically, section 16 of guidance (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/K-12-Guidance-2021-22-School-Year.aspx>) states:

“When actively practicing, conditioning, or competing in indoor sports, masks are required by participants even during heavy exertion, as practicable. If masks are not worn due to heavy exertion, it is strongly recommended that individuals undergo screening testing at least once weekly. An FDA-approved antigen test, PCR test, or pooled PCR test is acceptable for evaluation of an individual's COVID-19 status.”

VCPH is in alignment with this updated CDPH Guidance and strongly recommends once weekly PCR or twice weekly antigen testing for vaccinated and unvaccinated students when no masks are worn. The PCR test or one of the antigen tests should be performed within 2 days prior to a competition. If there are multiple games, all games within the 2 day period are allowed on 1 test. Some competition schedules may require more than one test for multiple games in the same week. When participants are not actively competing or performing, they are expected to wear masks. Coaches, spectators and the players on the side-lines must wear masks. This guidance is subject to local change as knowledge accumulates which supports more effective means of limiting COVID transmission, especially in light of new variants of concern such as Omicron.

29. Can theatre and choir students perform without wearing a mask if they are testing weekly?

CDPH has clarified that theatre and choir are **not** eligible to perform indoors without a mask even if testing weekly. This guidance is based on evidence from the International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study which states masks are recommended be worn while singing and speaking. The recommended guidance from this study can be found [here](#).

30. Can schools have large indoor events on a school site?

VCPH strongly encourages schools to hold any large events outdoors with face coverings on. Per CDPH and CDC recommendations, in areas of substantial to high transmission, people who are not fully vaccinated are encouraged to wear a mask in **crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated**. If schools choose to hold these

events indoors, they must follow the mega event guidance depending on how many attendees are present. Mega event guidance can be found [here](#) and the CDPH FAQs [here](#).

When hosting dances and large assemblies, the following considerations are strongly encouraged:

- Host such events outdoors whenever possible.
- Separate the event into smaller cohorts (by grade, for example) whenever possible.
- Ensure all eligible attendees (students and adults) are fully vaccinated. Conduct pre-entry testing for all unvaccinated attendees at or just prior to the event.
- Plan in advance how to identify close contacts if it is later discovered that someone with COVID-19 attended the event. Consider requiring pre-registration with CA Notify and maintaining a log of all attendees (even those arriving pre-event) at the door/entrance to the event.
- Consider requiring the use of masks at outdoor school-based large, crowded events. (Masks remain required indoors as per CDPH K-12 Guidance.
- If food or drinks are to be served, serve them outdoors whenever possible and/or place them away from other areas to clearly designate spaces where masks must be worn.

31. What should schools do when a student or staff members receives a “presumptive positive” test result with the state color lab?

CDPH has provided guidance for the interpretation and actions to take for the various test results provided by their lab. This guidance can be found [here](#). Specifically, for their “presumptive positive result” the state says: A presumptive positive test result (also known as inconclusive or indeterminate) indicates that you had a marginal trace of the COVID-19 virus in your specimen. This may mean you are either very early in your COVID infection and the amount of virus is just beginning to rise, or you are later in your COVID infection and the overall amount of virus is declining. It could also mean you are infected with COVID, but the sample that was taken for testing only captured a minimal amount of the virus when swabbing.

CDPH has provided guidance that an individual with this result should submit a new sample and self-isolate until the result of the repeat test is known.

32. Which K-12 settings should be the focus for school-based contact tracing efforts?

During outdoor recess, transient interactions between students are unlikely to meet the close contact definition of being within 6 feet for 15 minutes, per CDPH. Schools should continue to contact trace both indoor and outdoor exposures with prolonged stationary activities (within 0-6 feet for 15 minutes or more) such as in classrooms, when eating lunch, choir practice, band, and other indoor school-based activities. Outdoor sports and school dances should also be contact traced due to the frequent and sustained contact involved with these activities. Indoor activities are frequently associated with outdoor sports and school dances (i.e., locker rooms, transportation, communal meals, etc.), which are still considered to be settings at higher risk of transmission.

33. How should school staff determine whether a student's symptoms are due to being infected or recently vaccinated against COVID-19?

Most post-vaccination symptoms occur within the first 3 days of vaccination (the day of vaccination and the following 2 days, with most occurring the day after vaccination). Testing may help determine whether symptoms should be attributed to COVID-19 infection that could occur prior to the body's ability to develop immunity from

the vaccine, which typically takes about two weeks after the vaccination. Vaccination does not cause positive antigen and PCR test results for COVID-19.

Additionally, many of [CDC's post-vaccine considerations for workplaces](#) apply to K-12 schools, including information about signs and symptoms not caused by COVID-19 vaccination (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, loss of taste or smell). Suggested approaches for assessing and responding to post-vaccination symptoms are also provided.

Tables with updated Isolation and Quarantine Guidance from Cal/OSHA

Table 1: Exclusion Requirements for Employees Who Test Positive for COVID-19 (Isolation)

<p>Requirements apply to all employees, regardless of vaccination status, previous infection, or lack of symptoms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Employees who test positive for COVID-19 must be excluded from the workplace for at least 5 days. ○ Isolation can end and employees may return to the workplace after day 5 if symptoms are not present or are resolving, and a diagnostic specimen* collected on day 5 or later tests negative. ○ If an employee is unable or chooses not to test¹ and their symptoms are not present or are resolving, isolation can end and the employee may return to the workplace after day 10. ○ If an employee has a fever, isolation must continue and the employee may not return to work until the fever resolves. ○ If an employee's symptoms other than fever are not resolving, they may not return to work until their symptoms are resolving or until after day 10 from the positive test. ○ Employees must wear face coverings around others for a total of 10 days after the positive test, especially in indoor settings. Please refer to the section in this FAQ on face coverings for additional face covering requirements. <p>* Antigen test preferred.</p>
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**This table applies to students and staff*

Table 2: Employees Who Are Exposed to Someone with COVID-19 (Quarantine)

<p>Requirements apply to employees who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unvaccinated⁺ ; OR ○ Vaccinated and booster-eligible⁺⁺ but have not yet received their booster dose.⁺⁺⁺ <p>⁺ Includes persons previously infected with SARS-CoV-2 within the last 90 days.</p> <p>⁺⁺ See Table 4 for definition of booster-eligible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Employees must be excluded from the workplace for at least 5 days after their last close contact with a person who has COVID-19. ○ Exposed employees must test on day 5. ○ Quarantine can end and exposed employees may return to the workplace after day 5 if symptoms are not present and a diagnostic specimen[*] collected on day 5 or later tests negative. ○ If an employee is unable or chooses not to testⁱ and does not have symptoms, quarantine can end and the employee may return to the workplace after day 10. ○ Employees must wear face coverings around others for a total of 10 days after exposure, especially in indoor settings. Please refer to the section in this FAQ on face coverings for additional face covering requirements. ○ If an exposed employee tests positive for COVID-19, they must follow the isolation requirements above in Table 1. ○ If an exposed employee develops symptoms, they must be excluded pending the results of a test. ○ Employees are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated or boosted. <p>[*] Antigen test preferred.</p>
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⁺⁺⁺ Employers are not required to exclude asymptomatic employees in this category if:

- A negative diagnostic test^{*} is obtained within 3-5 days after last exposure to a case;
- Employee wears a face covering around others for a total of 10 days (please refer to the section in this FAQ on [face coverings](#) for additional face covering requirements); and
- Employee continues to have no symptoms.

Table 3: Employees Who Are Exposed to Someone with COVID-19 (No Quarantine Required)

<p>Requirements apply to employees who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Boosted; OR ◦ Vaccinated, but not yet booster-eligible.[*] <p>[*] (See Table 4 for definition of booster-eligible)</p>	<p>Employees do not need to quarantine if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Test on day 5 with a negative result. ◦ Wear face coverings around others for 10 days after exposure, especially in indoor settings. Please refer to the section in this FAQ on face coverings for additional face covering requirements. ◦ If employees test positive, they must follow isolation recommendations above. ◦ If employees develop symptoms, they must be excluded pending the results of a test.
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