

COVID-19 Response Toolkit for New Mexico's Public Elementary Schools

REPORTING

School districts and charter schools are to notify New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) as soon as a confirmed case of COVID-19 is detected.

If the case is a **staff member**, report must also be made to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMENV) within 4 hours of notification.

PREVENTION

- **Maintain physical distance (6 feet).** This is very important in preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- **Wear a face mask at all times** except when eating or drinking.
- **Wash your hands often with soap and water.** If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Clean and sanitize daily.** Focus on high-touch surfaces and areas where multiple cohorts of students gather.

TRANSMISSION

The virus spreads primarily from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet for 3 minutes or more).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- When droplets land in the mouths or noses, or are possibly inhaled into the lungs, of people who are nearby.
- By symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals.
- By people touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching their mouths, noses, or eyes.

INCUBATION

Individuals generally become ill between 2 and 14 days after exposure.

Though Bureau of Indian Education schools and private schools may use NMPED's Rapid Response protocols, this Toolkit does not apply to them.

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Definitions

Asymptomatic Confirmed Case: A person who has tested positive for COVID-19 by laboratory testing but did not experience any symptoms of illness within 10 days of the test.

Close Contact: Someone who:

- Has an exposure of three minutes or longer within six feet of a confirmed COVID-19 case with or without a face covering, or
- Was in the same class or cohort as a confirmed COVID-19 case.
- Was on the same bus as a confirmed COVID-19 case.

Confirmed Case: A person who has tested positive for COVID-19 by laboratory testing.*

*Confirmatory laboratory tests include Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and antigen testing from a respiratory specimen.

Cohorting: The practice of keeping groups of students, and staff, if possible, together over the course of the school day. The goal is to limit exposures to only those within the same cohort. This practice may help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by:

- Limiting exposure to an individual with COVID-19 to one particular cohort and not posing a broad risk to the rest of the school.
- Reducing contact with shared surfaces.
- Facilitating more efficient contact tracing in the event of a positive case.
- Allowing for targeted quarantine, testing, and/or isolation of a single cohort, instead of school-wide measures in the event of a positive case or cluster.

Contact Tracing Process: Contact tracing is the process of reaching out to individuals who have been exposed to a confirmed case of the virus in order to ensure they take the necessary precautions and receive any needed testing.

COVID-like Symptoms: Fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of smell or taste, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

[See additional information from the Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\).](#)

Infectious Period: Time during which an infected person is contagious and most likely to spread disease to others. If a student, staff or volunteer was at school during their infectious period, all of their close contacts must be identified and quarantined.

- For a confirmed symptomatic COVID-19 case, the infectious period starts two days prior to the illness onset date and continues 10 days after illness onset AND until patient is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications AND symptoms have improved.
- For a confirmed symptomatic COVID-19 case with severe illness or severe immunosuppression, the infectious period starts two days prior to illness onset date and extends to 20

days after illness onset date AND until patient is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications AND symptoms have improved..

- For a confirmed asymptomatic COVID-19 case, the infectious period starts two days prior to the specimen collection date and continues for 10 days after.
- If a confirmed asymptomatic COVID-19 case has severe immunosuppression, at least 20 days should have passed since the date of first positive specimen collected.

Isolation: The act of keeping someone who is sick or tested positive for COVID-19 without symptoms away from others by staying home from school, work, and other activities while infectious.

- Isolation should last at least 10 days after the onset of symptoms, plus additional time until fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, and experiencing improvement of symptoms.
- For people who never had symptoms, the isolation period is 10 days after the date their first positive test was collected.
- If someone has a severe illness or severe immunosuppression, the isolation period should be extended to 20 days.
- A negative test is not required to determine when to end the isolation period. When in doubt, the New Mexico Department of Health should be consulted.

Quarantine: Keeping a person who was in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 away from others. If someone has close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, they should stay home from school, work, and other activities for 14 days after their last exposure. The exposed contact should be tested for the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) no sooner than three days, ideally between seven and 10 days, following the last exposure to a confirmed case. If the close contact has a positive result, isolation should be implemented as described above.

Severe Illness: Indicated by hospitalization in an intensive care unit with or without mechanical ventilation.

Severe Immunosuppression: Severe suppression of immune response of an individual, includes being on chemotherapy for cancer, untreated HIV infection with CD4 T lymphocyte count <200, combined primary immunodeficiency disorder, and receipt of prednisone >20 mg/day for more than 14 days.

- Other factors such as advanced age, diabetes mellitus, or end-stage renal disease, may pose a much lower degree of immunocompromise and not clearly affect decisions about duration of isolation.

COVID-19 Preparation and Response for Elementary Schools

District Planning and Response Team

Assemble a COVID-19 District Planning & Response Team

1. Team Lead/Point Person
2. Superintendent or Charter School Leader & their Deputies
3. Head Nurse
4. HR Director
5. Head of Operations & Facilities
6. Head of Security
7. Principal of each school
8. An educator (designated by the Union if educators are represented)
9. A staff/facilities employee (designated by the Union if educators are represented)

The NMPED and New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) will train Team Lead/Point Person on how to handle suspect cases, quarantine and isolation, assessing exposure and identifying close contacts, and facility management.

At Each School. Prepare & Plan

Prepare a duty list and designate a backup for each team member.

Identify an isolation area for ill students or staff.

Plan for student pick up when one large area or the entire building needs to be evacuated at once:

1. Pick up of students
2. Sending staff home
3. Who stays last
4. Will buses be used

Plan for when a student cannot be picked up immediately.

Responsibilities of the School COVID-19 Point of Contact

Collect and maintain all information about who is in each building:

1. Staff rosters including cell phone numbers
2. On-site contractor rosters
3. Classroom and cohort rosters
4. Class schedules
5. After school program rosters
6. Real-time sign-in sheets/visitor rosters
7. Real-time student attendance data from school administrators
8. Bus route rosters
9. Each student's emergency contacts authorized to pick up, authorized medical care, and household member information, etc.
10. Up-to-date student addresses

Have key contact information on hand for state agencies who can answer questions:

- » NMPED
- » NMENV/OSHA for recording staff cases: 505-476-8700
- » NMDOH COVID hotline for general questions: 1-855-600-3453



Communication for Elementary Schools

COVID-19 Point Person

Each school must identify a COVID-19 Point Person to liaise with the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) Rapid Response Team. For many schools, the school nurse may be well-suited to serve in this role. In the event of a confirmed positive case in the school, the point person must be prepared to:

- Effectively communicate with NMPED and other state officials conducting case investigations.
- Provide classroom rosters and bus rosters that list all riding students and the buses they ride, and after school program lists for all participating students that include location and program sponsor.
- Provide up to date contact information for each student at the school.
- Oversee contact tracing and identify close contacts of confirmed cases.
- Ensure confirmed cases and close contacts are tested and do not return to school until the appropriate isolation or quarantine period has passed.

Please provide the name and contact information of the designated Point Person to NMPED in this [online spreadsheet](#). You may appoint one point person for all of your schools. However, please assign a back-up Point Person in the event that your Point Person is absent or ill.

Communication with Families

Communication regarding positive cases should be handled in a timely and thoughtful manner. Every effort should be made to maintain confidentiality of the infected individual. Within four hours of the school being notified of a positive case, the close contacts (**see page 3 for the definition**) should be notified by the school of the requirement to quarantine for 14 days. If the close contact is a staff member, the school must also notify them of the requirement to be tested (7–10 days from close contact exposure) for COVID-19. Please note, testing will only be required for those staff members identified as close contacts. Students identified as close contacts are highly encouraged to be tested but not required.

Within 4 hours of the initial notification of the positive case, schools must also notify families and staff that a positive case has been identified at the school site. **Please use the language contained in the *Notification Letter Template* for school communications regarding positive cases.**

Please see the *Staff & Student Individual Decision Tree* and the *Quarantine Decision Tree* for additional information.

Confidentiality Considerations

An individual's right to privacy should always be considered. In sharing information with students, families, and staff members, report the fact that an individual in the school has been determined to have COVID-19, rather than specifically identifying the student or staff member who is infected.

However, in relation to the sharing of information with NMPED Rapid Response members or NMDOH School Health Advocates, the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits non-consensual disclosures of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) from students' education records under the health or safety emergency exception to "appropriate parties" (such as public health officials) whose knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of students or other individuals. Additional information regarding FERPA and COVID-19 may be found in the [U.S. Department of Education's FERPA & Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#).



Rapid Response to a COVID-19 Case in an Elementary School Facility

RESOURCES:

- [NMPED](#)
- [New Mexico Testing Sites](#)
- [COVID-19 Test Results](#) website indicates which NMDOH results tested negative
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance](#)

Three ways a COVID-19 positive case may be identified in a school facility:

1. School is notified by state agency of a lab-confirmed positive case identified at their site.
2. Report made by a parent/guardian that their child has tested positive.
3. Staff is tested and reports positive result to the school.

Reporting of a Positive COVID-19 Case is Required

ACTION STEP	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
<p>1. Ensure the positive individual has been isolated and sent home. Inform the positive individual and his/her parents/guardians (if a student), that the positive individual will need to self-isolate for 10 days from the specimen collection leading to the positive test result AND until fever-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication AND until symptoms are improving.</p>	<p>School Administrator or District/School COVID-19 Point Person</p>	<p>Within 4 hours of notification</p>
<p>2. Districts and schools are to contact the NMPED Rapid Response Team to report the positive case within 4 hours of you being notified. Be ready to provide information about the positive case.</p>	<p>School Administrator or District/School COVID-19 Point Person</p>	<p>Within 4 hours of notification</p>
<p>3. If a staff member, also report the positive case within 4 hours to NMENV at 505-476-8700.</p>	<p>School Administrator or District/School COVID-19 Point Person</p>	<p>Within 4 hours of notification</p>
<p>4. Complete and submit information about the positive case and close contacts as requested by the NMPED as soon as possible but no later than 6 hours after receiving the emailed instructions. During this time you should also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shut down impacted facilities/classrooms for 24 hours; and • Perform enhanced cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting of facilities in accordance with CDC guidance. 	<p>School Administrator or District/School COVID-19 Point Person</p>	<p>Within 6 hours after calling NMPED, submit required information about the positive case and close contacts.</p>
<p>5. Provide COVID-19 Positive Case Letter to all staff and families in appropriate languages and on district/school letterhead. If the positive individual was not at school from two days prior to symptom onset (or if asymptomatic, two days before the specimen leading to the positive test result was collected) through the isolation period there is not a school exposure and there is no need to notify the school community.</p>	<p>School Administrator</p>	<p>Within 6 hours of notification</p>
<p>6. Call your regional School Health Advocate for any guidance needed regarding testing, cleaning, closure, etc. See the School Health Advocate Contact List on page 20 and Guidance for Closures on page 9.</p>	<p>School Administrator or District/School COVID-19 Point Person</p>	<p>No time requirement</p>

What to Report for Elementary Schools

School districts and charter schools are to report all positive cases of COVID-19 to NMPED within 4 hours of notification.

- Any laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19, **staff or student**, should be reported to NMPED. Be ready to answer the questions about the positive case and close contacts.
- If the case is a **staff member**, report must also be made to NMENV within 4 hours of notification.

Each district or school's COVID-19 Point Person must report positive cases of COVID-19 to NMPED (for any student, staff, or contractor in the school setting) and NMENV (only if a staff member). The NMPED will provide the COVID-19 Point Person with instructions for reporting information about the positive case and close contacts.

When your district or school's COVID-19 Point Person first calls NMPED, they will be asked basic information about the positive case, such as the name of your district, name of the school with the positive case, and personal information about the positive case. After calling NMPED, please call NMENV if the positive case is an employee.

After making these phone calls, your district or school's COVID-19 Point Person will immediately begin to complete the Incident Report, as defined below. This report must be submitted to NMPED within 6 hours of the original phone call.

Incident Report Information:

1. Your contact information as the district COVID-19 Point Person (phone and email)
2. Name and address of the school or district site that the infected person physically occupied
3. Date employer was notified of the positive test(s)
4. Last date each positive employee or student was at the school or district site
5. Date each positive employee/student began self-quarantine
6. Name, email, and cell phone number of Principal or Director
7. Number of staff/contractors and all other persons who were in the building on the date of positive case notification
8. Number of students who were in the building on the date of positive case notification
9. Type of School: Public, Charter, State-supported, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), or Private.
10. Name of the COVID-19 positive individual
11. Role of the positive individual (for example: student, teacher, school administrator, food service, custodial, bus driver, counselor, librarian, school nurse, educational assistant, administrator, secretary)



12. If a student, the grade the positive student is in
13. STARS ID#, if positive individual is a student
14. Birthdate of the positive individual
15. Home mailing address of the positive individual
16. Email address of the positive individual (or parent)
17. Phone number of the positive individual (or parent)
18. Have you notified NMENV for employee cases?
19. What date were families notified of the positive case? If they have not been notified yet, what date will they be notified? Please use the **Positive Case Letter** template provided on page 21 of this Toolkit, printed on your school/district letterhead.
20. What date were staff notified of the positive case? If they have not been notified yet, what date will they be notified? Please use the Positive Case Letter template provided in this Toolkit, printed on your school/district letterhead.
21. What type of reentry model was the district or school in when notified of the positive case? (For example: Full Reentry; Hybrid (ES), (ES, MS), (ES, MS, HS) or Small Groups of PreK-3, and/or Students with Disabilities only)
22. Which parts of the school site or building have you or will you close? (classroom, wing, school, cafeteria)
23. Is the case related to an earlier case at your school that you know of?
24. If the case is related to an earlier case, on what date was the school notified of the earlier case?
25. How many individuals are in the cohort of the positive case?
26. How many student close contacts were identified?
27. How many staff close contacts were identified?
28. On what date did the school or impacted area reopen?
29. How long was the school (fully or partially) closed?

A “**close contact**” is defined as a person who came within six feet of the positive individual (even while wearing a mask) for longer than three minutes AND all students and staff who were in the same classroom(s) of the infected individual AND all students who were on the same bus as the infected individual. For all identified close contacts, you should send them home to quarantine for 14 days. If the close contact is a staff member, they need to be tested. Testing is highly recommended for students who are close contacts. A negative test results does not reduce the period of quarantine for close contacts.

Important Final Step: Check to see if the confirmed positive individual resides with any other district students or employees--for example, siblings or household members of a confirmed positive student who attend other schools, or students who are the children of employees or contractors at the district/school. If so, share confirmed positive case information among the appropriate schools through their COVID-19 Points of Contact so that impacted students are quarantined and impacted staff members are quarantined and tested.

Important Note: If you are notified that a household member of a student or staff member is infected, please contact your regional School Health Advocate to confirm whether this information is a confirmed infected case. If so, quarantine the students or staff members who reside in the same household of this confirmed case. They should quarantine for 14 days from the last date of contact with the infected Individual or 14 days from the last date on which the infected case is likely to have been infectious (10 days after symptom onset, or 10 days from specimen collection leading to positive test result) and they, household members, should be tested.

You may hear from a representative of NMENV or OSHA in your jurisdiction to implement control measures if staff are involved.

Guidance for Elementary School Closures

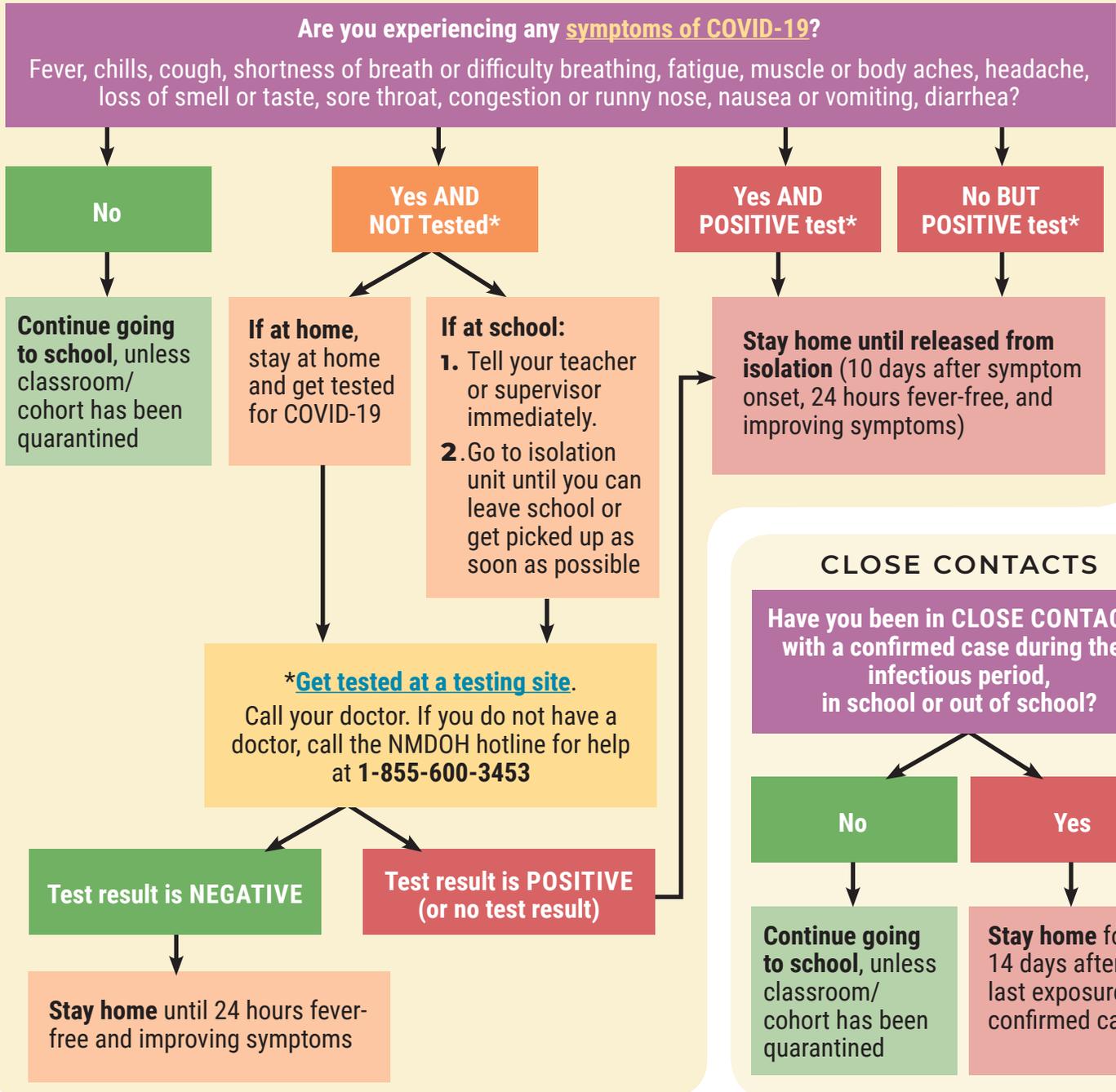
Consult with the NMPED Rapid Response Team and your School Health Advocate to determine which areas, if any, to close.

COVID SITUATION	DURING INVESTIGATION	POST INVESTIGATION
<p>One or more confirmed cases within the same classroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close off areas used by the person who is sick. • Wait 24 hours before you clean or disinfect. • Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick, such as classrooms, offices, bathrooms, and common areas • Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once area has been appropriately disinfected, it can be opened for use. • Students and staff in close contact with positive case quarantine for 14 days; staff get tested. Testing is highly recommended for students. • School/district sends out Positive Case Letter on appropriate letterhead to staff and students using the provided template in this Toolkit.
<p>At least 2 cases within 14 days of each other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close affected rooms/wing. • Follow same procedures as above. 	<p>Follow same procedures as above.</p>
<p>Considerations for siblings and household members: If an individual (student or staff) tests positive, all of their household members should be quarantined for 14 days and tested.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close the room of the positive individual. • Follow same procedures as above. • If siblings or household members test positive, their classrooms will need to be closed and their close contacts will need to be quarantined and tested (if staff) if they were in a classroom two days prior to symptom onset or specimen collection date for the positive test. • If siblings or household members test negative, there is no need to close their classrooms or quarantine or test their close contacts. However, the siblings and household members still need to quarantine. 	<p>Follow same procedures as above.</p>

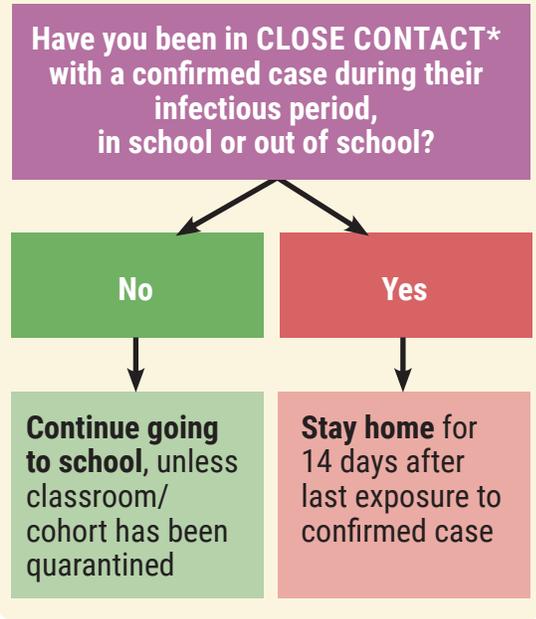
Elementary School Staff and Student Decision Tree

The following decision tree was created for families, students, and staff to better understand the steps that should be taken if they develop symptoms. Testing of close contacts (required for staff) should happen 7–10 days into quarantine, or at onset of symptoms. A negative test for a close contact of a COVID-19 positive individual does not end the quarantine period.

INDIVIDUAL PERSON



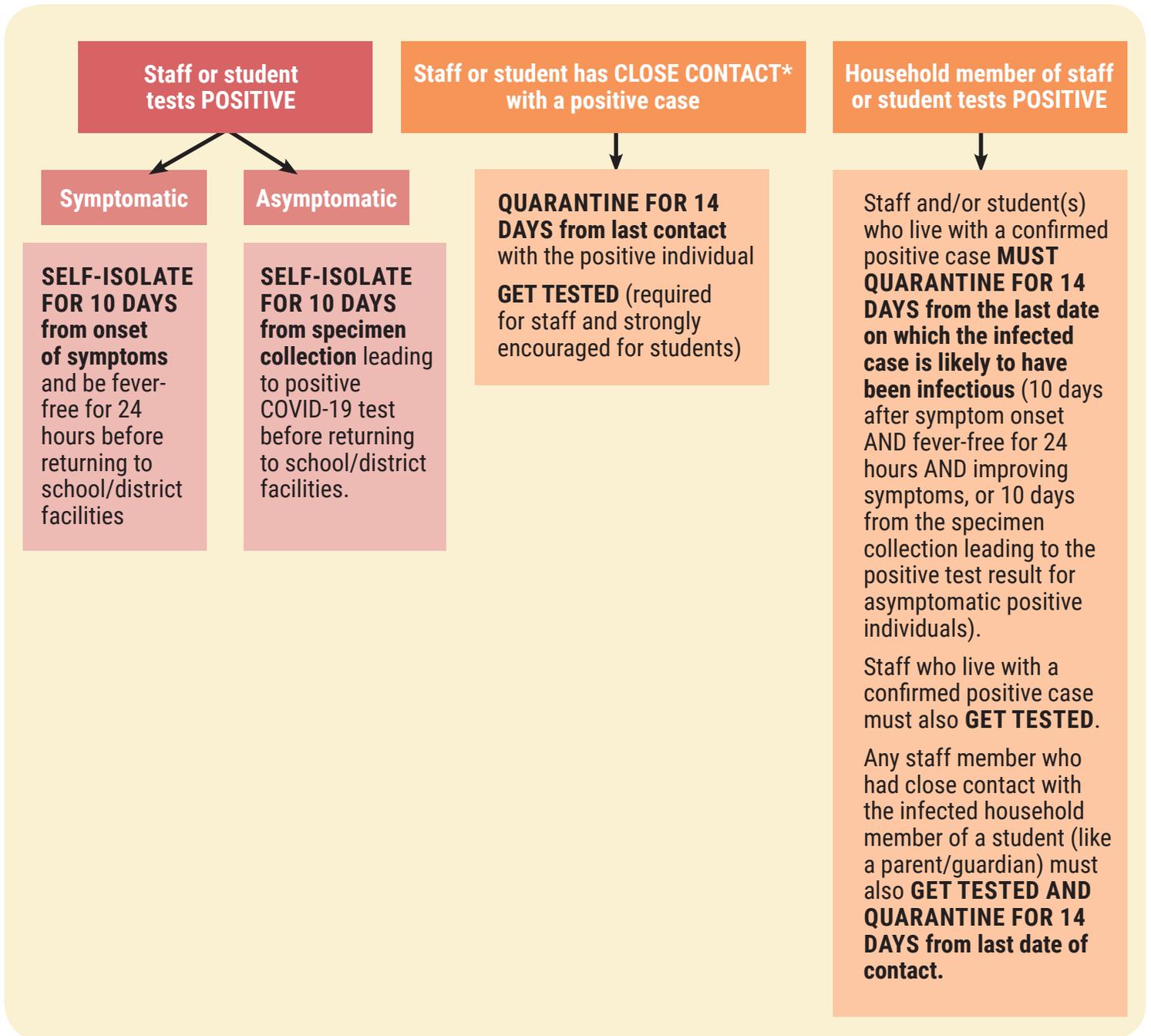
CLOSE CONTACTS



*See definition of Close Contact on page 3.

Elementary School Quarantine/Isolation Decision Tree

The following decision tree was created for families, students, and staff to better understand the steps that should be taken if quarantine is necessary



*See definition of Close Contact on page 3.

Mild or Chronic COVID-19 Symptoms in Elementary Schools

Students or school staff with mild non-specific COVID-19 symptoms, such as headache, runny nose, diarrhea, etc., should be sent home to self-isolate. Staff should get tested and should remain in isolation until the results are available. A negative test result will discontinue the isolation and the staff member may be allowed to return to school provided that their mild non-specific symptoms do not interfere with their ability to work at school.

Students with chronic, mild non-specific COVID-19 symptoms should have their symptoms assessed either by a school nurse, physician or their parents/guardians. If there are no changes in symptoms from the baseline state, students would not need to be tested and may participate in school. If the student has a change in symptoms from their baseline as assessed either by a parent/guardian, school nurse or a physician, then that student should be tested for COVID-19 and be placed in isolation until the results are available. A negative result will discontinue the isolation. If a student has a change in their baseline state and the

student does not get tested, the student must self-isolate for 10 days and be fever-free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours and have improving symptoms before returning to school.

Students or staff with allergies, asthma, or other non-infectious disease which may present with mild non-specific COVID-19 symptoms should contact their primary care provider. The primary care provider may furnish the staff member with a memo stating that present, non-specific mild symptoms do not differ from the patient's baseline, indicating the individual may return to school without being tested for COVID-19.

Students or staff who have tested negative for COVID-19 in the past two weeks, should not be tested again in the presence of chronic symptoms that have not changed in a meaningful way during that interval. If those symptoms were to change from their baseline, then the student or staff should begin home isolation, and staff members should be tested.



Face Coverings and Personal Protective Equipment for Elementary Schools

In accordance with the [New Mexico Department of Health Public Health Order](#), all people must wear a face mask while at school, during school-sponsored activities, and on school transportation. Limited exceptions are described below.

Face Masks

Reasons for Wearing Face Masks

[Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) guidance [calls on Americans to wear face masks to slow and stop the spread of COVID-19](#). [Wearing face masks slows the spread of COVID-19](#) by reducing the distribution of respiratory droplets by the wearer. The Public Health order requires mask-wearing for all people, including asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic people who are around other people, because they don't know they have the virus. The most important function of masks is source control. When there is universal mask-wearing, people protect each other from getting the virus. Universal mask-wearing, coupled with social distancing, hygiene practices, and other transmission-reducing practices, are critical for reducing the contagion rate of COVID-19.

Face Mask Criteria

Face masks must cover the mouth and nose and fit snugly against the sides of the face in order to contain respiratory droplets. **The types of allowable face masks include:**

1. [Face masks made of two or more layers of cloth](#).
2. Disposable masks for people who forget to bring their masks to school.
3. [Face masks with a clear plastic window](#) or that are made of clear material.
4. Surgical, procedural, [N95 or KN95 face masks](#) that are approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use by staff performing medical duties or similar close contact assignments.

The following face coverings are NOT substitutes for face masks:

- [Masks that have exhalation valves or vents](#)
- [Bandanas](#)
- Scarves
- [Neck gaiters](#) (also known as a neck fleece)
- Face shields in most instances (see further discussion below)

According to the CDC, [masks that have exhalation valves or vents cannot be used because they allow respiratory droplets to be expelled](#). Therefore, masks with exhalation valves or vents do not prevent the person wearing the mask from transmitting COVID-19 to others.

In addition, based on research that has emerged regarding the relative effectiveness of different types of materials and designs, bandanas, scarves, and neck gaiters are not permitted as substitutes for face masks because they are significantly less effective at containing the droplets that are expelled when a person speaks, sings, coughs, sneezes, etc.

Finally, the CDC states that "it is not known what level of protection a face shield provides to people nearby from the spray of respiratory droplets from the wearer. There is currently not enough evidence to support the effectiveness of face shields for source control. Therefore, [the CDC does not currently recommend use of face shields as a substitute for masks](#)."

Any district or school that has purchased these materials should contact NMPED as soon as possible to pursue alternative options.



Using Face Masks

Wearing the Face Mask Correctly

- Wash your hands before putting on your mask.
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin.
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face.
- Make sure you can breathe easily.
- Don't put the mask around your neck or up on your forehead.
- Don't touch the mask while it's on your face unless removing it to eat or drink, and, if you do, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer to disinfect before touching your mask.



Washing Cloth Face Masks

- Ideally, a cloth face mask should be washed and dried after each use (after a day at school).
- Masks may be washed in a washing machine or by hand. Optimally, the face mask is dried in a dryer at the hottest setting or is dried outside with sunlight.

Keeping Face Masks on During the Day

Face masks must be worn all day while on school campuses, at school-sponsored events and on school transportation. The only time the face mask may be off is while eating and drinking during allowed times. If a student removes the face mask and refuses to wear the mask during other times, then the student will have to be picked up from school and taken home. While waiting for pick up, the student should be supervised and quarantined from other students. Local school district and charter school policies should set forth the number of times a student may remove a face mask and receive a warning prior to being sent home.

Limited Exceptions to Wearing Face Masks

There are very limited circumstances under which a face mask cannot be worn. According to [CDC guidance](#), the following individuals should not wear a face covering: children under age two, or anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove

the mask without assistance. In these cases, fully remote learning is the best option to keep the student safe, as well as other students, staff, and the greater school community.

When wearing a face mask would obstruct breathing or exacerbate another medical condition for a student, then the student should be seen by a healthcare provider to discuss whether it is safe for the student to be in school during the public health emergency. [American Lung Association Chief Medical Officer Dr. Albert Rizzo](#) states that “cases of exemption are very few and far between,” and “people with supplemental oxygen or compromised respiratory status which become short of breath even when walking might meet [CDC] criteria, which in that case, going out in public is a health risk to the person.” For these students, fully remote learning is the safest option.

For students who cannot wear a face mask and have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan, the IEP team or 504 committee should meet to make a determination about possible accommodations based on the totality of needs, including the student's needs and the community's public health needs. In most cases, the IEP team or 504 committee should consider fully remote learning as the appropriate accommodation. In other cases, such as when the student has a breathing obstruction or other severe medical condition that would be exacerbated by mask-wearing, the IEP team or 504 committee may determine whether a face shield could be substituted for a face mask after receiving medical documentation that would support such a determination. In the event the IEP team or 504 committee allows a face shield to be substituted for a face mask, the face shield must be hooded, or start at the forehead, and wrap around the face from ear to ear and extend to the chin. In extreme cases when a face mask or a face shield cannot safely be worn, the IEP team or 504 committee shall convene to review medical documentation and consider whether individualized accommodations would allow the student to receive in-person instruction in such a way that staff and other students are kept safe. Additional personal protective equipment (PPE) for the student, other

students in proximity to the student, and the staff serving the student should be considered.

When a student with an IEP or 504 Plan cannot wear a face mask due to a behavioral issue, then the IEP team or 504 committee should convene to develop a fully remote learning option and a plan for teaching the student to wear a face covering so the student may return to in-person learning as soon as possible.

When convening the IEP team or 504 committee to consider remote learning, face shields or other individualized accommodations, please meet with your legal counsel and Special Education Director or 504 coordinator to ensure that all state and federal laws are followed, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the New Mexico Human Rights Act, Section 28-1-1 NMSA 1978 et seq. In addition, please convene appropriate school staff to explore all options to include the student in whatever activities are feasible, including outdoor learning, in a safe manner to the greatest extent possible while minimizing and mitigating risks and making other possible accommodations.

Students who do not have and are not eligible for an IEP or 504 Plan must wear a face mask in order to attend school in-person. The alternative is fully remote learning.

Face Masks and Staff

[According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the U.S. Department of Labor, wearing a face mask is considered a lawful condition of employment.](#) When wearing a face mask would exacerbate a breathing obstruction or another severe medical condition for the staff member, the staff member may provide medical documentation to support a request for alternate work as a reasonable accommodation if feasible.

Staff who work with students not wearing a face mask due to the circumstances described above should wear a medical mask or face shield in addition to a cloth face mask. For these situations, schools should provide staff with a medical mask (surgical, procedural, [N95](#), or [KN95](#)) and/or other PPE.

Staff who work with students who need to lip read or face read in order to learn should wear a face mask that has a clear plastic window or is made

of clear material. Discussion of [clear plastic mask features and where to buy clear plastic masks](#) may be found online. (NMPED does not endorse any particular face mask vendor.)

Mask-Wearing and the Americans with Disabilities Act

The need for public health and safety must be balanced with requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. Under the ADA, a public accommodation may not be required when it would pose a “direct threat” to the school community. [§ 36.208 \[Direct threat\]](#) of the ADA states as follows:

- a. This part does not require a public accommodation to permit an individual to participate in or benefit from the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and accommodations of that public accommodation when that individual poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others.
- b. In determining whether an individual poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, a public accommodation must make an individualized assessment, based on reasonable judgment that relies on current medical knowledge or on the best available objective evidence, to ascertain: The nature, duration, and severity of the risk; the probability that the potential injury will actually occur; and whether reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures or the provision of auxiliary aids or services will mitigate the risk.

Moreover, a reasonable accommodation also may not be required when it presents an “undue burden”. [§ 36.104 \[Definitions\]](#) of the ADA regulations defines “undue burden” as involving “significant difficulty or expense. In determining whether an action would result in an undue burden, factors to be considered include:

1. The nature and cost of the action needed under this part;
2. The overall financial resources of the site or sites involved in the action; the number of persons employed at the site; the effect on expenses and resources; legitimate safety requirements that are necessary for safe operation, including crime

prevention measures; or the impact otherwise of the action upon the operation of the site;

3. The geographic separateness, and the administrative or fiscal relationship of the site or sites in question to any parent corporation or entity; and
4. If applicable, the overall financial resources of any parent corporation or entity; the overall size of the parent corporation or entity with respect to the number of its employees; the number, type, and location of its facilities.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, all people's health and safety must be considered. To keep people safe by reducing community spread of COVID-19, wearing a face mask is a state mandate and must be enforced in schools. The following reasonable accommodations for students and staff who have a disability that precludes mask-wearing are permitted:

1. Students with an IEP or 504 Plan will have access to fully remote learning as the accommodation that keeps the maximum number of people safe;
2. For students who have a breathing obstruction or other severe medical condition that would be exacerbated by mask-wearing, the IEP or 504 Plan team may consider whether to allow the student to wear a face shield after taking into account whether PPE and other additional precautionary measures could be used to keep everyone in the school community safe. In extreme cases when a face mask or a face shield cannot safely be worn by a student with an IEP or 504 Plan, the IEP team or 504 committee shall convene to review medical documentation and consider whether individualized accommodations would allow the student to receive in-person instruction in such a way that staff and other students are kept safe;
3. Staff for whom wearing a face mask would exacerbate a breathing obstruction or another severe medical condition may provide medical documentation in support of a request for

alternate work as a reasonable accommodation.

Please note that the above discussions of legal considerations do not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon in any individual case. It is critical that school districts and charter schools seek the advice of human resources staff and legal counsel about specific cases.

Mask and PPE Supplies Required at Each School

Schools may require families to provide masks for their students. Schools also must have on hand, prior to the start of in-person learning in the hybrid or full reentry operating category, a sufficient quantity of masks for students who have left their masks at home, as well as masks for staff and PPE for staff whose duties include close contact assignments.¹

Schools need to have in stock the levels of face masks and PPE itemized in the [Safety Plan Checklist](#).

Each district and charter school needs to identify a single PPE Point Person who will conduct and report weekly inventory of masks and other PPE to the NMPED. The NMPED will provide ongoing training and support for these PPE Point Persons.

¹A close contact assignment includes any staffing assignment in which a staff member must be within six feet of distance from a student in order to fulfill their duties (such as staff who change student diapers, who change feeding tubes, or who provide services to students with behavioral needs necessitating closer contact).

If a school does not have medical masks and/or face shields on hand for staff with a close contact assignment, the school may still have elementary students return in the hybrid model, but must not require a staff member to perform close contact duties until a medical mask and/or face shield is provided. (Staff must wear the face shield with the face mask.)

COVID-19 Surveillance Testing in Public Elementary Schools

All public schools that meet the following qualifications are eligible to have elementary students on campus in a hybrid operating category, starting on September 8, 2020:

1. Have an approved reentry plan with NMPED, and
2. Acquire adequate levels of masks and personal protective equipment onsite, and
3. Be located in a county with a 14-day average daily case count of fewer than eight per 100,000 and a test positivity rate of under 5%, and
4. Provide a signed [Safety Plan Checklist](#).

(Criteria above not required for private schools to open.)

In addition to meeting the above qualifications, reopening in a hybrid operating category also requires participation in surveillance testing. The purpose of surveillance testing is to detect COVID-19 outbreaks as early as possible by screening asymptomatic staff.

For eligible schools that choose to open, NMPED has implemented a weekly 5% surveillance testing requirement for faculty and staff who are physically working at the schools. The intent of the 5% surveillance testing requirement is that all staff working in a school will be tested over the course



Private schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools are encouraged, but not obligated to participate in surveillance testing.

of the year. Surveillance testing is not required for in-person small group instruction under the remote only instructional model.

COVID-19 Point Persons will be designated at each public school to identify staff to be tested, coordinate staff's attendance at testing events, and track the number of staff who are tested on a weekly basis. Staff who participate are expected to inform the school's identified Point Person of their test results. This will facilitate swift and efficient rapid response efforts in the event of an identified case. Districts and schools may consider allowing staff to test on days designated for deep cleaning between cohorts when direct instruction is not occurring.

Access to COVID-19 testing will be provided at NMDOH local public health offices at no cost to the individual. Insurance information will be requested, but deductibles, copayments, or other out-of-pocket charges will not be incurred. Testing also will be provided to people without insurance. If payment is requested for COVID-19 testing, please notify the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance (OSI) at 1.833.415.0566.

Surveillance testing is to be completed at NMDOH local public health offices in order to quickly and accurately track data. In the event that the NMDOH local public health office is objectively far from the school district or charter school, please have the superintendent or charter school head administrator contact the public health office to discuss whether there is an available alternative.

Staff will have the ability to pre-register for testing (unless otherwise instructed by the public health office) using the [NMDOH registration app](#) and will need to complete the employer and insurance information.

A list of [NMDOH Public Health Offices](#) can be found on the department's website.

Air Filtration in Elementary Schools

High-quality air filtration is one aspect of a multi-pronged strategy for ensuring healthy school environments. To address issues and concerns surrounding air quality, NMPED will work with each district and school to ensure installation of high-quality air filters. In addition, each district shall have an established and written protocol on inspecting, repairing and providing maintenance on ventilation systems within all school facilities.

Ventilation system upgrades and improvements will increase the delivery of clean air and dilute potential contaminants within each classroom and school facility. The NMPED will be deploying the [American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers \(ASHRAE\) recommendation](#) which states the target level for filtration in schools is minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) 13 or higher. On average, this will remove 75 percent of particle size of 0.3 to 1.0 μm . This higher standard of filtration is more effective at removing viral particles from the air. The ASHRAE document linked above provides additional guidance on determining compatibility of various types of HVAC systems with a MERV 13 filter.

In instances where MERV 13 filters are not available or not compatible with existing HVAC systems, the

NMPED will work with those districts and schools to identify the highest quality compatible filters.

Additionally, districts and schools unable to immediately install MERV 13 or its equivalent must work with their operations staff to take the following actions in accordance with the [guidelines from the CDC](#):

1. Run the central air fan continuously;
2. Open dampers to increase air flow;
3. Open windows and doors (be mindful of possible safety considerations); and
4. Deploy box fans or other portable fans and air purifiers with high air circulation capacity in addition to prioritizing the use of these items in classrooms with higher ventilation needs.

Please note, in order for any school to begin classes in the hybrid model per NMPED guidance, schools and districts will need to take immediate actions to assess their systems, to procure filters with the highest MERV rating compatible with existing school systems, and to install the recommended filters as soon as they are delivered to the school, as well as take all necessary measures to optimize filtration systems and augment air flow according to the CDC guidance.

Elementary School Safety Plan Checklist for COVID-19 Preparation and Response

- You have and will maintain an inventory of **masks and PPE** for students and staff:
 - ▶ Two multi-layer cloth masks per staff member
 - ▶ Two multi-layer cloth masks per student
 - ▶ Additional disposable masks for students and staff
 - ▶ 20 medical masks (surgical, procedural, [KN95 or N95](#)) and a face shield for each staff member with a close contact assignment (for optimal protection KN95 and N95 masks may be fit tested for better seal and filtration)
 - ▶ At the request of the employee, a reusable or disposable full-length gown for any employee whose duties subject them to conditions in which social distancing and PPE standards cannot be guaranteed
 - ▶ Bottled hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) or soap and water hand-washing stations available for use by employees and students
 - ▶ Employees who work with staff or students with COVID-like Symptoms (school nurses, staff in isolation rooms, etc.) shall have [N95/KN95](#) masks and face shields
- You have identified a **PPE Point Person for your district/school** and [entered their contact information in the appropriate NMPED Google document](#). Your district PPE Point Person is responsible for maintaining and reporting weekly inventory of masks and PPE to NMPED through a web-based portal. NMPED will provide training and support on this requirement.
- You have identified a **COVID-19 Point Person for each school** in your district and [entered their contact information in the appropriate NMPED Google document](#).
- You have a **social distancing plan** in place which allows no more than 50% of the registered students to be in any given classroom at any one time. Districts located in counties in the green zone that have an enrollment for in-person learning of 100 students or less may bring back students in all grades for in-person learning in a 5:1 student to staff ratio per enclosed indoor space.
- You will ensure **student groups remain in cohorts**.
- You have and will maintain an inventory of **CDC-approved cleaning supplies**.
- You have **sufficient custodial resources** so that the areas of the schools are cleaned in accordance with [CDC standards for cleaning and disinfecting schools](#) in between “A Day” and “B Day” cohorts. Custodians may volunteer for overtime if necessary; if the District cannot complete the necessary tasks with voluntary overtime, it will engage third party vendors to insure that the work areas are cleaned in accordance with CDC standards between “A Day” and “B Day”.
- You have an established and written **protocol on inspecting, repairing, and providing maintenance on ventilation systems** within your buildings. Filtration levels (MERV ratings) shall be maximized for equipment capabilities. MERV 13 filters shall be used in HVAC systems that are compatible with that type of filter. Systems that are not compatible with a MERV 13 filter shall use the filter with the highest MERV rating compatible with the system.
- You have read and reviewed **NMPED’s COVID-19 Response Toolkit for New Mexico’s Public Elementary Schools** and will abide by its guidelines.

I certify that my district/school has completed the above actions.

DISTRICT/CHARTER SCHOOL NAME

SUPERINTENDENT/CHARTER DIRECTOR NAME

SUPERINTENDENT/CHARTER DIRECTOR SIGNATURE

DATE

NM Department of Health School Health Advocate Contact List

Districts and schools may contact their local School Health Advocate (SHA) according to their region for guidance in terms of testing and quarantine procedures.

SCHOOL HEALTH ADVOCATE	REGION	EMAIL	OFFICE PHONE	PROFESSIONAL CELL
Leslie Berry RN	Northwest	leslie.berry@state.nm.us	505-836-4561	505-490-7948
Jennifer Downey RN	Northeast	jennifer.downey@state.nm.us	505-476-2653	505-469-3010
Barbara Lynn Wheeler RN	Northwest-Metro Area	barbaral.wheeler@state.nm.us	Teleworking	505-467-9292
Maricelda Pisana RN	Southeast	maricelda.pisana@state.nm.us	Teleworking	575-528-8863
Crista Pierce RN	Southwest	crista.pierce@state.nm.us	Teleworking	575-339-4380
Susan Acosta RN	State of NM	susan.acosta@state.nm.us	Teleworking	505-490-2763



Template for Notification of Positive Case to Elementary School Community

This letter template may be used to notify the school community of a COVID-19 positive case. [Download an editable MS Word version this document to customize.](#)

[PRINT ON LETTERHEAD OF FACILITY]

[INSERT DATE]

To: Parents or Guardians of children who attend [INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL]

[INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL CHILD ATTENDS] is working with the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) and New Mexico's Department of Health (NMDOH) because a staff member at our facility or a child who attends our school has tested positive for COVID-19.

This letter is to inform you about the next steps necessary to protect your child and our community from COVID-19. Per guidance from both NMPED and NMDOH, we are required to investigate to see who had "close contact" with the staff member or student who tested positive for COVID-19. A "close contact" is defined as being closer than six feet for more than three minutes to a person who is positive for COVID-19 and all staff and students who were in the same classroom or on the same bus as the infected individual. According to NMPED and NMDOH, all staff who were in "close contact" with the infected individual must be tested seven to 10 days after close contact exposure to the positive COVID-19 individual. All students who were close contacts are strongly encouraged to be tested. Both staff and student close contacts must self-quarantine at home for 14 days, regardless of the test result.

In the meantime, if you or your child begin to develop symptoms of COVID-19, which are fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of smell or taste, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea [<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>], please call your healthcare provider or the COVID-19 Hotline at 1-855-600-3453.

It is important that you call ahead to your healthcare provider before presenting to the physician's office, clinic, urgent care or emergency room so that they can be prepared for your arrival. They may also refer you to a testing clinic.

Areas of the school (including buses) in which the COVID-19 positive individual spent time will be cleaned and disinfected and those who were close contacts of the positive case will be notified.

Please continue to send your child to school unless you are notified that your child was a close contact of a positive COVID-19 individual, your child develops COVID-19 symptoms, or your child has a positive COVID-19 test. Likewise, your household members do not need to quarantine unless your child tests positive for COVID-19 or your household members are identified as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 individual.

You may call [INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL-BASED COVID-19 POINT PERSON at PHONE NUMBER] or NMDOH at (505) 827-0006, if you have questions.

Thank you for your support in these efforts.

Sincerely,

[SIGNED BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR]