

Guidance for a “Test to Stay” Strategy for K-12 Schools

Schools are an essential part of community infrastructure and in-person instruction for K-12 students is a priority. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on an **optional** modified strategy for managing COVID-19 exposures in the school setting. [CDC guidelines](#) emphasize the implementation of layered prevention strategies to protect students, teachers, and staff, which includes isolation of persons who test positive for COVID-19 as well as tracing of their close contacts and quarantine of unvaccinated contacts. This document outlines considerations for a “test to stay” strategy to allow unvaccinated students who are exposed to COVID-19 at school to continue **in-person instruction only** with repeated negative COVID-19 testing. Students participating in this strategy must continue to be quarantined from all extracurricular activities.

*In-person instruction includes riding the bus or carpooling to/from school

Components of a successful Test to Stay strategy

- 1) **Keep the Local Health Department (LHD) informed.** Inform your LHD if your school district chooses to implement the Test to Stay strategy. Data should be shared with the LHD weekly about the number of individuals participating in the program and the number who test positive while participating.
- 2) **Implementation of a universal masking program** in the school for all students, teachers, and staff.
- 3) **Implementation of a [screening testing](#) program** at the school or in the school district that provides rapid SARS-CoV-2 testing to students, faculty, and staff at no cost to the individual.
- 4) **Voluntary participation** by exposed contacts. The school/district is responsible for ensuring the appropriate arrangements for testing are made. Testing should be conducted with informed consent from the appropriate person or parent/guardian.

Contact tracing procedures with a Test to Stay option

- Ensure positive results are reported to the LHD. Schools should initiate contact tracing to identify individuals who have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19. A close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of an infectious person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes in a 24 hour period.
 - **Exception:** In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were at least 3 feet away from an infected student if both students correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time and other K-12 COVID-19 prevention strategies were in place. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.
- All individuals identified as close contacts to a COVID-19 case in a school setting should be notified of their possible exposure.
 - Unvaccinated students, teachers, or staff who are identified as close contacts who were exposed within the school setting should be instructed to either:
 - Self-quarantine away from school OR
 - Participate in the Test to Stay program.
 - To be eligible for the Test to Stay program, the individual must:

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- Be entirely asymptomatic, without any signs or [symptoms of COVID-19](#);
- Wear a mask indoors when at school for the entirety of the program, even if all test results are negative. A medical grade mask that securely fits to the face is preferred over a cloth face covering;
- **Have been exposed to the person with COVID-19 at school only.** This strategy applies to *in-school-related exposures only* and is not applicable to exposures that occur outside of school, during extra-curricular events or in the community (e.g., in a household). An unvaccinated household member of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should still quarantine away from school; AND
- **Quarantine when not at school.** When not at school, the exposed individual must stay home and refrain from all extracurricular activities, including sports and other activities in the community setting.
- [Quarantine may be discontinued](#)
 - After day 7 if the individual is symptom-free and receives a negative COVID-19 test 5 days or later after the last date of exposure to the case; or
 - After day 10 without testing if the individual is symptom-free; or
 - When the LHD determines it is safe for the individual to be around others.
- **Fully-vaccinated* persons do not need to quarantine** following an exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 if he/she is not experiencing symptoms, but are recommended to be tested 3-5 days after an exposure. If testing occurs at the school, follow the guidance outlined below.

* \geq 14 days have passed since receipt of the Janssen (J&J) vaccine or the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

Test to Stay Protocol

Persons who meet all the eligibility criteria for the Test to Stay program outlined above and who have consented to participate should observe the following protocol:

- Testing should be performed each day that the individual is in-person at the school.
- Testing should occur at the school or at an offsite location accessible to students, faculty and staff.
- Testing should be initiated as soon as possible after the identified exposure and all subsequent days following the exposure through day 5 after the last exposure. Testing and quarantine may be discontinued after day 7 if all test results have been negative.
- Testing should occur at the start of the day and negative results should be received before the individual participates in in-person learning; where possible, exposed students should refrain from riding a school bus or riding with other non-household members to school before receiving at least one negative test.
- If a test result is positive, the individual must be sent home to isolate immediately.
- The test should be an FDA-approved rapid antigen test to identify [current SARS-CoV-2 infection](#) and be performed by a licensed healthcare provider or trained personnel under a CLIA-waiver.
- Positive test results must be reported to LHD and all appropriate disease reporting requirements must be fulfilled by the school or the laboratory, including submission of the



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Kentucky reportable disease form.

- Testing is recommended to be performed a minimum of 24 hours apart.
- Symptom screening, including temperature checks, should occur at the time of testing.
- Individuals who refuse to complete the daily testing should be immediately sent home from school to quarantine and follow the standard quarantine procedures.

Additional considerations

- The Test to Stay strategy may be most appropriate for school settings where students are cohorted in a single classroom or grade and are not mixing with other students.
- The Test to Stay strategy may not be appropriate for all in-school exposures. It is reasonable to consider additional factors to determine whether the exposure presents higher risk, such as:
 - Lack of masks or other layered prevention strategies in the setting
 - Total number of cumulative days of exposure (e.g., infectious individual only present in school 1 day during infectious period vs. an entire week)
 - Participation in activities that are high risk for disease transmission (e.g., singing, shouting, playing wind instruments)

Reference: Developed based on Draft Test to Stay Guidelines from Kentucky Department for Public Health