



State of California—Health and Human
Services Agency
**California Department of
Public Health**



March 9, 2022

TO: All Californians

SUBJECT: Group-Tracing Approach to Students Exposed to COVID-19 in a K-12 setting



This guidance goes into effect on March 12. See the guidance that is in effect until the end of March 11.

Related Materials: 2021-2022 K-12 Schools Reopening Framework and Guidance | 2021-2022 K-12 Schools Guidance Q&A | Safe Schools for All Hub | More Languages

Updates effective as of March 12, 2022:

- The Preamble has been updated
- Testing guidance has been aligned with CDC recommendations

California's determination to use every available tool to keep schools safe during this pandemic is allowing us to keep classrooms open and in-school transmission low. Since the start of the pandemic, the state has adapted to new challenges presented and responded with strategies harnessing available tools.

The shorter incubation period, airborne nature of SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission, and increased transmissibility of variants currently circulating in California suggest an additional approach to contact tracing is warranted. The framework outlined below allows for a quicker and broader response to cases identified in school settings, accomplishable through prompt notification, testing, and isolation protocols. This strategy also allows for schools to provide safe in-person instruction without undertaking intense (and often protracted) contact tracing processes to identify individual students within a specified radius of someone infected.

All of this is possible in California's schools because the multi-layered approach to COVID-19 mitigation has effectively curbed in-school transmission to-date. These other layers – such as getting vaccinated, wearing high-quality well-fitting masks, staying home and testing if symptomatic, and improving indoor air quality – remain effective and important school-based mitigation efforts.

Additional guidance, including additional requirements, may be issued by local public health officials, local educational agencies, or other authorities. In workplaces, employers are subject to the Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS) or in some workplaces the CalOSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard, and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.

Recommendations for students exposed to someone with COVID-19 in a K-12 school:

1. Schools should notify students who spent more than a cumulative total of 15 minutes (within a 24-hour time period) in a shared indoor airspace (e.g., classroom) with someone with COVID-19 during their period of infectiousness.
 - a. Notification should occur to "groups" of exposed students (e.g., classmates, teammates, cohorts, etc.) rather than contact tracing to identify individual "close contacts" (e.g., those within 6 feet).
 - b. Notifications should be provided to all individuals considered exposed, including those who are vaccinated and/or recently infected.
 - i. For example, if a student in tenth grade is diagnosed with COVID-19, the school should notify groups with whom that student interacted as per the criteria above, such as those in the same classes, sports team, and/or other extracurricular cohorts.
 - c. A sample notification letter is available [here](#) for school edit and use.
2. Exposed students, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status, should get tested for COVID-19 with at least one diagnostic test obtained within 3-5 days after last exposure, ~~delete text~~ unless they had COVID-19 within the last 90 days.
 - a. Exposed students who had COVID-19 within the last 90 days should monitor for symptoms. If symptoms develop, they should isolate and get tested with an antigen test.
 - b. In the event of wide-scale and/or repeated exposures, broader (e.g., grade-wide or campus-wide) once weekly testing for COVID-19 may be considered until such time that exposure events become less frequent.
 - c. Any FDA-authorized antigen diagnostic test, PCR diagnostic test, or pooled PCR test is acceptable for evaluation of an individual's COVID-19 status. For individuals who have been recently infected (within the past 90 days), antigen testing is strongly recommended as PCR results may remain persistently positive and not be indicative of a new active infection. Repeat antigen testing and/or confirmatory molecular 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).
3. Exposed students may continue to take part in all aspects of K-12 schooling, including sports and extracurricular activities, unless they develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19. They should test as recommended in Section (2), report positive test results to the school, and follow other components of this guidance, including wearing masks as is strongly recommended.
 - a. Exposed students who develop symptoms should see Section 4 of the K-12 Guidance.

- b. Exposed students who receive a positive test result should isolate in accordance with Section 10 of the K-12 Guidance.
4. See the K-12 Schools Guidance 2021-2022 Questions & Answers for additional information.

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