

Aug. 12, 2022

To our K-12 school partners,

As the new school year begins, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) would like to share updated recommendations for ongoing prevention of COVID-19 spread in schools. These steps will help keep students, staff, and your communities safe, while also keeping students learning in the classroom throughout the year.

Right now, most Ohio communities are experiencing high levels of community spread following a summer surge in cases. While cases have increased, the good news is hospitalizations remain lower compared to past surges, especially those resulting in ICU admission.

Thankfully, we are in a much better position to protect students and staff from severe outcomes from COVID-19 as we begin this new school year. We now have much stronger immune resistance stemming from a combination of vaccines and prior illness. We have access to COVID-19 vaccines for children as young as 6 months. We also have widespread access to treatments proven to reduce the risk of serious illness and hospitalization for our most vulnerable Ohioans, including staff and family members of students who are more vulnerable to severe illness based on their age or medical conditions.

ODH has worked collaboratively with our local health departments, communities, and schools across the state to help minimize COVID-19 spread in schools during the last three school years. Our guidance regarding how best to keep our students safe, healthy, and in school continues to evolve.

On Aug. 11, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its guidance](#) on how people can protect themselves and others from COVID-19, what actions to take if exposed to COVID-19, and what actions to take if you have symptoms or test positive with the virus.

As a result, ODH is updating its guidance for Ohio K-12 schools and recommending the CDC's general guidance to best protect Ohio's students in the school setting.

- First, because contact tracing and case investigation has shifted to focus on high-risk environments, such as long-term care facilities and healthcare settings, **ODH is no longer recommending the [Mask to Stay, Test to Play](#) quarantine alternative for schools.**
- Instead, ODH recommends schools follow [general isolation procedures from the CDC](#) for confirmed cases. **If students or staff feel sick or suspect they might have COVID-19, they should stay home and take a rapid test. If positive, students and staff should stay home from school for at least 5 days and longer if necessary until fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and symptoms are improving.** Additionally, after isolation ends, students and staff should continue to take precautions as they resume normal activities by wearing a mask for 5 days (or after two negative tests 48 hours apart).

In addition, we recommend schools work closely with their local health department to monitor community spread and make decisions about the best measures to protect students and staff based on what is happening in your community.

Tests for K-12 schools

As schools start heading back into session over the coming weeks, our COVID-19 testing team wants to assure you that we have rapid tests available for K-12 schools. We have started to use a [SurveyMonkey tool](#) that schools can use to submit orders. We are allowing schools to request different test types based on their intended use (e.g., on-site vs. at-home administration), and the ordering tool provides some guidance about different potential uses for the different tests. Please feel free to utilize this tool and plan for when your schools might need tests.

In addition to the rapid antigen testing options that can be requested directly from ODH, there are PCR testing options available as well that are a good option for schools that want to implement regular surveillance testing. The Midwest COVID-19 Testing Coordination Center operated by Battelle provides free PCR testing solutions for schools that are interested in this approach. In addition, Ohio has a partnership with Thermo Fisher Scientific to offer its ReadyCheckGo school testing program to Ohio schools at no cost. You can reach out to either of these great partners directly, or contact us at TestingRequests@odh.ohio.gov for more information.

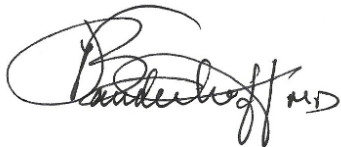
Resources for K-12 schools

- [CDC: Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#)
- [CDC: Community Levels](#)
- [CDC: Community Levels by County](#)
- [ODH: What to Do if You Have COVID-19](#)
- [ODH: How schools can request COVID-19 tests](#)

Thank you for your continued partnership and your efforts to keep students and staff safe, healthy, and in the classroom this school year.

For more information, visit coronavirus.ohio.gov.

Sincerely,



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Ohio Department of Health