Principals’ COVID-19 FAQs

This page was last updated on February 4, 2022 at 9:31 AM.

Principals should reach out to their superintendents to escalate issues; principals may also escalate or surface issues by emailing covid19virus@schools.nyc.gov.

Additional Resources

Please visit the following resources for up-to-date information around managing COVID-19 in schools.

- School Health Policy
- COVID-19 Testing (including surveillance testing, staff testing, and home test kits)
- Situation Room

Staff Testing

**Will teachers be able to continue to get tested at school?**

Yes.

**Does the 10% of staff testing include custodial, kitchen, paras, and SSAs?**

Schools can test up to 10% of DOE staff after student COVID-19 PCR surveillance testing is complete. DOE staff can be tested if they are in the DOE consent data sent to PCR testing providers.

School-based testing will be made available to DOE staff whenever schedule and capacity permit. Testing providers are bound by test capacity and the time scheduled and may not always be able to test all interested staff.

Please note that only DOE staff are eligible for testing with the in-school COVID-19 PCR testing providers. Non-DOE staff, even if they have submitted consent using the health screening app, will not appear in the PCR testing providers consent data.

**How should we determine which staff should be tested?**

Staff courtesy testing is not subject to randomization, and staff are not included on the RCOV student testing roster. The principal may determine how staff are selected and should choose a method that works best for their school. Staff must still consent to test,
and they are encouraged to submit consent proactively in the DOE’s Health Screening application to minimize testing time.

However, all staff will receive an at-home rapid test kit each week. It is recommended that the staff member can use the first test on Monday and the second test on Friday. Any home test kit given to staff must be used at home and not while in the school building.

I have vaccinated teachers who are experiencing COVID-like symptoms, but are waiting for their test results. Do these teachers stay home and isolate? If so, for how long?

Staff with symptoms need to stay home. If they test negative, they may return with symptoms improving. If they do not receive test results within 5 days of symptom onset, or if they test positive, fully vaccinated school-based staff may return on Day 6 if they had mild symptoms and only if their symptoms have resolved. Mild symptoms include being fever-free for 24 hours without the use of medication and overall symptoms improving. At work, from Day 6 through Day 10, the positive teacher/school-based staff member must consistently and correctly wear a well-fitting higher level face covering, such as a KN95 mask or a surgical mask under a cloth mask.

Isolation Due to a Positive Test Result

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

As per the CDC, isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick. Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. Someone who tests positive needs to isolate.

I understand new policies go into effect on Monday, January 31. How do I know who can enter my building?

Starting Monday the 31st, anyone who can pass the health screener can enter the building.

I have people testing positive who have recently recovered from COVID. Do they need to isolate?

Students or staff who have recovered from a confirmed case of COVID within the past 90 days do not have to quarantine or test following an exposure unless they show COVID symptoms. The health screener, as of January 31, will be revised to address this question. Students and staff who tested positive AND had COVID within the past 90 days can enter the building. Going forward, students or staff who have recovered from a confirmed case of COVID within the past 90 days should not receive at-home test kits following exposure and should not participate in PCR testing.

Are positive cases starting Day 1 by the date in which they tested or the date in which symptoms started?
Whichever day is earlier – date of first symptoms or date of test, should be considered Day 0.

How do I calculate dates? I want to know when someone can return to school after testing positive.

The infectious period begins two days before symptoms OR two days before the test date, if the student has no symptoms and ends five days after the symptom onset or test date.

For example: A student developed symptoms on December 31 but tested positive from a test on January 3 the Event Date is December 31. The positive student must isolate for five days, which takes us to January 5. The individual may return on Day 6, which would be January 6.

Another example: A student had a test administered on January 2 because they were concerned they were exposed. The student tested positive. The Event Date is January 2. The student must isolate for five days, until January 7 and can return to school on January 8.

Therefore, anyone who was in class with the positive person during their infectious period gets one test kit (2 tests). People do not get additional test kits if they are exposed on multiple days or if they have recovered from a confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 90 days.

Someone tested positive in school but has now tested negative with a home test. Is this a false positive?

When there are discordant results between tests, please notify the Situation Room. The DOHMH clinical team will review the discordant results and decide whether the positive test should stand. There are some guiding principles:

- A negative home test will not overturn a positive PCR test.
- Two negative PCR tests on separate days within 96 hours of the positive PCR test are required for overturning a positive result.
  - For example, if an individual tests positive on a surveillance or at home test, they must receive two negative PCR test within 96 hours of the initial positive exam, in order to be eligible to return to school or work.
- If the person is either symptomatic or has been exposed to someone with COVID (in or out of school) DOHMH will not overturn a positive result.

Who should I inform if a student tests positive for COVID-19?

Please ensure to inform all adults who interact with the student in the building, including during the school day as well as during after school hours. This would include a CBO Director, Athletic Directors/Coaches, intervention specialist, and any other school-based program that would have interacted with the positive student.

Please explain the new shortened isolation process.
In alignment with new CDC and New York State Department of Health policies, the isolation period for **all staff and students in Kindergarten and above** who test positive for COVID-19 has been shortened to five days (from ten), regardless of age or vaccine/booster status. Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 do not need a negative COVID test to return to school or work on Day 6.

Anyone who has tested positive and returns to school or work after Day 5 must wear a well-fitting face covering from Day 6 through Day 10. DOHMH recommends a high-grade well-fitting mask such as a KN95 or KF94, or a surgical mask worn under a cloth mask. Schools’ Custodian Engineers have adult-sized KN95 masks available for staff and for students who can tolerate a high-grade mask; they also have three-ply surgical masks for students who cannot tolerate a high-grade mask, including younger students. Anyone who experienced symptoms and tested negative for COVID but is returning to school or work must also wear a well-fitting face covering from Day 6 through Day 10. If the individual cannot wear a well-fitting face covering for the duration of the school day, the individual should continue to isolate and can return on Day 11.

**After testing positive and isolating for the five days, does an individual need a negative test to return?**

No negative test is needed to return on Day 6.

**At-Home Rapid Test Kits**

**NEW! I heard we need to distribute home test kits to everyone before the Midwinter Recess. Is this true?**

The DOE wants to ensure that everyone (students and staff) has a test kit to use prior to returning from the midwinter recess. Students and staff can use this kit to test on the evening of Saturday, February 26 and the evening of Sunday, February 27 before returning on Monday, February 28. Please note that while use of the test kit is strongly encouraged, participation is voluntary, and staff and students are not required to show proof of a negative test result before being allowed to return to work or school.

**Distribution to Staff:** For the week of February 14, schools should distribute home test kits to all staff on Monday, February 14 and again on Friday, February 18. This is to ensure staff have a second kit (2 tests) to use before they return from the midwinter recess on February 28.

**Distribution to Students:** All students should receive home test kits (2 tests) on Friday, February 18, even if they were exposed earlier in the week. A family letter to accompany the February 18 distribution of test kits will be available on the Messages for Families page on February 11.

**How should the kits be distributed? Who gets a test kit?**

Schools should distribute a home test kit (2 tests) **once a week to all staff members**. It is recommended that the staff member use the first test on Monday and the second test on Friday. Should a staff member need an additional test kit due to extenuating circumstances, the staff member should request one from the Principal.
Anyone working in the school building, including custodial staff, CBO staff, nurses, SSAs, cafeteria staff can receive a home test kit if they want one. Any home test kit given to staff must be used at home and not while in the school building.

Additionally, any student who exhibits COVID-like symptoms at school or has been exposed to COVID-19 in a classroom setting should receive home test kit for use at home. Students who are exposed multiple times during the same week only need to receive one test kit for that week.

Students or staff who have recovered from a confirmed case of COVID within the past 90 days should not receive at-home test kits following exposure, unless they develop symptoms while at school.

As home test kits must not be used in the school building, schools are advised to distribute the kits towards the end of the day.

Principals should send home the relevant letters, available on the COVID-19 Testing InfoHub with the test kit; it includes links to videos on how to use the test kit.

This is how to use the kits:

- For individuals experiencing symptoms: The individual experiencing symptoms should use both tests within 24 hours. The first test should be used immediately upon returning home, and the second test should be used 24 hours later. The individual must stay home until two negative home rapid test results have been received. The individual may return to school/work after two negative test results and if they are fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.
  - If a fully vaccinated staff member tests positive they should notify their principal so they can report the case to the Situation Room. The employee should follow the updated isolation guidance, under “School-Based Staff Returning from Isolation After Testing Positive.” Note that additional testing is not required.
  - If a student tests positive, the principal should be notified so they can report the case to the Situation Room. Currently, students must isolate for five days.

- For individuals exposed to COVID at school: Students and staff who may have been exposed to COVID at school should be given a home test kit to take home. The individual should administer the first home test on the day they receive the test kit and then again on Day 5. If the first home test administered is negative, the individual may return to school the next day. This customizable letter must go home with the test kit; it includes links to videos on how to use the test kit.
  - Please note, if an individual begins to show symptoms of COVID before Day 5, they should use the second test kit immediately, treating themselves as a potential positive case and isolate.
  - For an unvaccinated student who is exposed in the home, the student must continue to quarantine for an additional five days after a household member’s isolation period has ended, if the household member is not isolated from the student or the student continues to be exposed to the household member in the same home during that time.

As mentioned above, anyone who tests positive, regardless of vaccine status, from a take home test should immediately report it to the school and begin isolating. Students who test positive must isolate for five days and can return to school on Day 6.
negative test is required to return to school if an individual completes the full isolation period.

This information is available on the COVID Testing InfoHub page and the COVID School Health Policy Infohub page.

Do LYFE, 3-K, and Pre-K, students receive test kits?

Schools with 3-K, Pre-K, and LYFE programs with students age 3 and older will distribute these take-home COVID-19 rapid test kits to any student age 3 and up who exhibits COVID-like symptoms.

Staff working in LYFE, 3-K, and Pre-K classes should receive test kits for personal use at home, if exposed at school, or if they show symptoms. If these students have shared a classroom space with an individual that tests positive for COVID-19, they must continue to quarantine if exposed to that individual during their infectious period.

However, the quarantine period has been shortened for some students. For scenarios below, when completing their quarantine period, students are not required to produce a negative test result before being allowed to return to school.

- Children who are at least two years old and have been exposed to COVID-19 may now test back into school on Day 6, after completing a five-day quarantine (previously, these students were able to test back in on Day 8). In order to return to school on Day 6, these students must be symptom-free, and test negative on a lab-based test performed by a healthcare provider on Day 5 or test negative using two at home rapid tests taken on Day 4 and Day 5. Starting on Monday, January 31, students aged 2 and older may now receive home test kits when exposed at school, in addition to when they are experiencing symptoms. Families may choose to use these home test kits to test out of quarantine and return on Day 6.
- Children under two-years old in LYFE classrooms can still test back into school on Day 8, after completing a seven-day quarantine. In order to return to school on Day 8 these students must be symptom-free, and test negative on a lab-based test performed by a healthcare provider on Day 5 or after.
- Exposed children that do not get tested can return to school on Day 11 after completing a ten-day quarantine.

I am a high school principal. A student was in class all day on Monday and tests positive on Monday evening. He was in school the whole previous week. I understand all classmates from his Monday classes get kits, but should I distribute test kits to his classmates from Friday? What about from Thursday? How far back should I go?

Please report this to the Situation Room and they will provide additional guidance.

However, the rule is the infectious period begins two days before symptoms OR two days before test date, if the student has no symptoms.

I had someone test positive who was in the cafeteria, in the gym, the auditorium, other large assembly space, and/or on a yellow bus. Do I give out test kits to everyone who was in those spaces at that time?
No, individuals who are exposed to a positive case in the cafeteria, gym, auditorium, yellow bus or other large, shared non-classroom space do not receive test kits.

**A student was exposed on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. How many kits do I give to the student?**

The student should receive one kit (two tests). The student should test on Monday and then use the second test on Thursday night.

If an individual is exposed multiple times in a week, they don’t need another kit until next week; the two tests should be able to pick up any infection.

Schools should have enough supply to give out one test kit per exposed student per week. The DOE is in process of replenishing supplies for coming weeks.

**What about testing out of quarantine?**

As mentioned above, this home testing program applies only to school exposures; it does NOT apply to individuals with household or other exposures.

Students in Kindergarten and older who are not fully vaccinated and experience an exposure outside of the classroom must still quarantine at home for five days.

For an unvaccinated student who is exposed in the home, the student must continue to quarantine for an additional five days after a household member’s isolation period has ended, if the household member is not isolated from the student or the student continues to be exposed to the household member in the same home during that time.

**How many tests are in the kits?**

Students and staff will receive two tests; most test kits contain two tests. Only the ACON Flowfex kits contain one test per box, so in that case, two boxes should be given out to each individual who needs one.

**Are we allowing students and staff to use the kit at school? Can school nurses administer tests?**

No. Students and staff should not use the kits at school.

DOE nurses are not permitted to perform COVID testing on members of the school community, therefore, nurses are not allowed to use these kits on students. The kits must be used outside of school under adult supervision.

**If a student is exposed in a class and tests negative on a home test, when can the student return to class?**
Students who have in-school exposures will no longer be required to quarantine at home. As long as they receive a home test kit and test negative, they should continue to come to school so long as they do not show any symptoms or feel ill. As noted above, the student should take the first test on the day they receive the test kit, if it is negative, they can return to school the next day. The student must take the second test on Day 5 after the exposure, and can remain in school provided that test is negative and they continue to be asymptomatic.

**What documentation, if any, do we need to gather from parents and/or staff to verify home test results?**

If a student/staff member takes a PCR or rapid lab-based test, they should provide the report they receive to the principal.

For the home rapid kits, there is no need to verify results. The verification takes place via answering the questions on the daily health screener.

**What happens if a parent/child refuses to administer the in-home kit? Is it mandatory for them to complete the at home tests before coming back to school? How do we track this information?**

We really need families to use the test kits. Families must still complete the health screener in order to enter school, and the updated screener questions reflect use of a test kit. Students/families are attesting to a negative or positive home test result following an exposure in school on the screener and must complete the health screener every day.

**I have a parent who doesn't want to use the home test on her child because nose swabs give her child a nose bleed. What should I do?**

We are currently working with Legal and our health partners to figure out the best course of action for this situation.

**For those students who were previously considered "close contacts" and who will receive a kit now, does the parent have to pick up the kit?**

Kits should be distributed to students and staff in the following categories:

- To all staff, on a weekly basis
- To all exposed to COVID in classroom, meaning there was a positive case in the classroom
- To anyone exhibiting COVID like symptoms while at school

Kits should be backpacked home along with the relevant Situation Room letter.

**Will the at home tests be accepted as proof of positivity by the Situation Room now?**
At this time all positive tests are being accepted, whether results are from PCR, antigen, or home test kits and there will be no verification process going forward. Please see the Situation Room InfoHub page for more details.

What kind of record-keeping is required for the principal regarding at-home test kit distribution to staff and students? Will there be serial numbers and a log required to keep for auditing purposes?

Custodial engineers have a list of numbers of kits for each school in their buildings and will maintain basic record keeping. At this time there is no expectation for principals to track which tests are given to which students and staff. However, should a school wish to track this, they can. Schools may record the date the kit is given and the recipient.

How do I get more test kits? How and when will our current COVID supplies (tests, KN95s, etc.) be replenished?

The Division of School Facilities has provided directions to each of the custodians on site on how to request and receive additional tests and PPE.

Other Questions

What happens with individuals who have recovered from COVID-19 in the past 90 days?

Students or staff who have recovered from a confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 90 days do not have to quarantine or test following an exposure unless they show COVID symptoms.

The health screener will be revised to address this scenario. Students and staff who tested positive AND had COVID within the past 90 days can enter the building. This includes students in 3-K and Pre-K.

Students or staff who have recovered from a confirmed case of COVID within the past 90 days should not receive at-home test kits following exposure and should not participate in school-based PCR testing.

Should KN95 masks be distributed to staff?

Yes, they must be distributed to staff returning to school on Day 6 after a positive test and must be worn through Day 10 after the positive test or the onset of symptoms, whichever is earlier.

In addition, staff should receive one KN95 mask per week upon request.

Should KN95s be distributed to students?
Custodian Engineers have adult-sized KN95 masks available for staff and for students who can tolerate a high-grade mask; they also have three-ply surgical masks for students who cannot tolerate a high-grade mask, including younger students.

School may distribute, at the rate of no more than one per week, an adult-sized KN95 mask to a student who wants one and can tolerate wearing one.

Is there guidance on staff meetings and in person principal/AP meetings/school visits?

These meetings should be limited when possible. If an in-person meeting needs to happen, current guidance must be followed, including physical distancing, wearing of proper PPE, increased ventilation, etc. Food and drinks should not be served.

I have vacancies in subcentral but no one has picked up the assignments. What are my options?

Please flag your school’s staffing shortage via the daily morning staffing form. Your Superintendent and/or Exec Superintendent will be in touch to provide support.

Will the daily health screener be updated to reflect these new policies?

The daily health screening form will be updated on January 31 to reflect recent policy changes. The health screening form will continue to be updated as health policies evolve.

Are there any changes in afterschool programs?

No, afterschool may continue. However, please note that given the new practices for COVID in DOE schools, the Situation Room will no longer be taking COVID reports for afterschool programs. Instead, school-based sites will continue to be notified of cases in their program’s school buildings via emails from the Situation Room. DYCD school-based after school programs should follow the reporting guidance for Center-based programs.

If a student tests positive for COVID and attends after school, the school can provide test kits to close contacts in the afterschool program, including any school or CBO staff. Aligned to DOE policy, the classroom/afterschool contacts can return the following day if they test negative.

Do principals still need to enter positive cases in OORS under N08 since they are calling the Situation Room?

As mentioned in the January 25 edition of Principals Digest, principals are no longer required to record positive COVID-19 cases in OORS, in addition to reporting them to the Situation Room, except when a student shows COVID-like symptoms OR the school learns of a student’s positive test result, while the student is in the school building, and is sent home before the end of the school day.
These two types of incidents must still be reported in OORS, using code N08 (medical illness).

Where do we report positive cases? Can you re-share the link to the online form?

Positive cases must be reported to the Situation Room. You can report cases through the Intake Form at https://apps.nycenet.edu/rtsiintake. Please see the Situation Room InfoHub page for more information.

Will there be updated notification letters available to principals in lieu of the close contact letter from the Situation Room?

All the Situation Room communications are being revised to align with new policies. Please see the Situation Room InfoHub page for more information.