

Principals' COVID-19 FAQs

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Dedicated COVID Command Center (C3)

The DOE has established a COVID Command Center at Tweed to resolve urgent school and district-level challenges as needed, coordinate citywide response, and gather data and information to support ongoing COVID response.

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

Each Executive Superintendent has a dedicated point of contact in the Command Center to provide rapid response and ongoing support, as needed.

The COVID Command Center will gather significant data on critical issues to inform the DOE's ongoing COVID response and critical school-level support. This customer service approach will ensure any escalated issues are fielded, logged, and routed to proper channels for appropriate follow-up and resolution.

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

Is priority testing available for DOE staff?

All DOE staff members receive priority testing at City testing sites specified in [the email](#) from DHR on 12/30.

What types of tests are available at each DOE priority test site?

Most sites only offer PCR testing. Some sites may offer rapid tests, while larger H&H sites may also offer at-home kits. Types of tests vary by site and availability. Unfortunately, we do not have specifics about what is offered at each site.

Related Links

[Principals' COVID-19 FAQs](#)

[Timekeeping](#)

[Donations and Fundraising Rules](#)



Can I bring my child to a DOE priority testing site? ▼

DOE testing sites are intended exclusively for DOE staff. You may bring your child with you, however, they are not eligible for priority testing. For more information, please visit the [Coronavirus staff update page](#).

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](#) [link](#) 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](#) [link](#) to minimize testing time.

However, all staff will receive an at-home rapid test kit each week in January. All staff will receive a home test kit every Monday in the month of January. It is recommended that the staff member can use the first test on Monday and the second test on Friday, regardless of exposure or symptoms. 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 symptoms, but are waiting for their test results. Do these teachers stay home and quarantine? 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 72 hours without the use of medication, not having a runny nose; and not having a severe or productive cough. 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.



Isolation Due to a Positive Test Result

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine? ▲

As per [the CDC](#) [link](#), 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 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 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.

If someone tested positive during the Winter Break, when can they return? ▲

Anyone (students or staff) who tested positive up until December 26 needs to quarantine for 10 days from their test date or symptom onset date, whichever is earlier. The new 5-day isolation period is only for school-based staff and applies to cases on December 27, 2021 and onwards.

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.

NEW! 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 10 days after the symptom onset or test date.

For example: An individual developed symptoms on December 31 but tested positive from a test on January 3 the Event Date is December 31. The positive individual must isolate for 10 days, which takes us to January 10. The individual may return on Day 11, which would be January 11.

Another example: An individual got tested on January 2 because they were concerned they were exposed. The individual tested positive. The Event Date is January 2. The individual must isolate for 10 days, until January 12 and can return to school on January



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.

New! 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 test on separate days within 96 hours of the positive PCR test are required for DOHMH to consider overturning a positive result.
- 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. ▲

The State of New York recently issued updated guidance on isolation periods for essential staff during periods of critical staffing shortages due to the surge of COVID-19. Essential staff includes teachers and school-based staff as stated in the "[Advisory on Shortening Isolation Period](#).  This guidance shortens the isolation period for these individuals who test positive, but are asymptomatic or showing mild symptoms, from 10 to 5 days. Teachers and school-based staff who are fully vaccinated may now return to work on Day 6 after testing positive for COVID-19 under the following conditions:

- Per State guidance, the positive teacher/school-based staff member must be asymptomatic OR have mild symptoms only:
 - They must be fever-free for 72 hours without the use of medication;
 - They must not have a runny nose; and/or,
 - They must have a minimal cough only, cannot be coughing up phlegm.
 - Symptoms must be improving or residual.
- 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, which will be provided to staff if they do not have one, and they must distance themselves from others when they must remove their mask for eating or drinking during this time.
- School-based staff working under this policy must continue to stay at home outside of work, take precautions to avoid household transmission, and observe other required elements of isolation while not at work until the end of the 10-day period.



Staff who do not meet the above criteria must continue to isolate for 10 days.

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

No negative test is needed to return on Day 6.

Language clarification: "can" return Day 6 or "must" return? Also, who determines mild symptoms?

The expectation is that school based staff return on Day 6 if they meet the criteria outlined. Mild symptoms are currently defined as:

- Fever-free for 72 hours without the use of medication
- No runny nose
- Minimal cough only, cannot be coughing up phlegm
- Symptoms must be improving, or residual

Does the shortened isolation process apply to students? How about other staff, like CBO staff and afterschool staff?

Currently, students who test positive must isolate for 10 days. We understand the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently recommended shortening the isolation period for all individuals (not just essential workers) who test positive, but are asymptomatic or showing mild symptoms, from 10 to 5 days. As the State and City review this policy, we will notify you immediately of any changes to the current isolation policy for students and non-school-based staff.

Since CBOs are not run by the Department of Education, afterschool providers may choose to adopt the shortened isolation period for their employees.

At-Home Rapid Test Kits

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

All staff will receive a home test kit this week and every Monday in the month of January. It is recommended that the staff member use the first test on Monday and the second test on Friday, regardless of exposure or symptoms. 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.

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. Letters will be revised to reflect this policy.

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.



Only symptomatic students, or students who are in a class where a student tested positive bring home a test kit. DOHMH recommends that home test kits are distributed to students in grades kindergarten and up.

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.

Additionally, schools should distribute test kits to students and staff in the following scenarios:

- 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. This [customizable letter](#) must go home with the test kit; it includes links to videos on how to use the test kit.
 - 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 10 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. It is recommended that the individual also seek a PCR test.
 - It is important to note that this home testing program applies only to school exposures; it does NOT apply to individuals with household or other exposures. Individuals who are not fully vaccinated and experience an exposure outside of the classroom must still quarantine at home for 10 days. If those individuals obtain a lab-confirmed negative COVID-19 test result on or after Day 5 from exposure, they can return to school from quarantine on Day 8.

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 10 days and can return to school on Day 11. No 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](#).



Beginning January 10, 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.

For students in 3-K, Pre-K, and children ages 3 and up in LYFE, the quarantine policy will remain the same, meaning that any student in 3-K, Pre-K, and children ages 3 and up in LYFE who were in close proximity to a positive case will still have to quarantine for 10 days. These students may test out of quarantine by taking a test on Day 5 or later and if the test is negative, may return to school on Day 8. Students younger than 3 need to quarantine for 10 days and do not have the option of testing out of quarantine.

NEW! 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 in question 1, this home testing program applies only to school exposures; it does NOT apply to individuals with household or other exposures.



Individuals who are not fully vaccinated and experience an exposure outside of the classroom must still quarantine at home for 10 days. If those individuals obtain a lab-confirmed negative COVID-19 test result on or after Day 5 from exposure, they can return to school from quarantine on Day 8.

How many tests are in the kits? ▲

Students and staff will receive two tests; most test kits contain two tests.

- District 31 (SI) and Districts 4, 5, 6 (Upper MN) are getting Carestart kits with 2 tests per kit
- All of Brooklyn and Districts 1, 2, 3 (Mid, Low MN) are getting ACON Flowflex kits with 1 test per kit so 2 kits will need to be given to each person in this scenario
- All of Bronx and Queens will get iHealth kits with 2 tests per kit

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.

NEW! 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 of 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 for the month of January
- 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 letter (available on the [COVID -19 Testing InfoHub](#)).

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

NEW! 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 question. Students and staff who tested positive AND had COVID within the past 90 days can enter the building.

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, for the month of January.

Should KN95s be distributed to students?

No.

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](#)  has been updated and launched the morning of January 3. The health screening form will continue to be updated as health policies change.



Are there any changes in after school 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? ▲

This is being worked out and more details are forthcoming.

Where do we report positive cases? Can you reshare 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/rtsintake> . Please see the [Situation Room InfoHub](#) page for more information.

Do we need to report positive cases from over the break? ▲

Yes. 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.

