



**Updated Mississippi State Department of Health Public Health Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in K-12 Settings, 2021-2022 School Year
January 18, 2022**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently updated their public health guidance for school settings with shortened quarantine and isolation guidelines ([Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC](#); [Overview of COVID-19 Quarantine for K-12 Schools | CDC](#); [Overview of COVID-19 Isolation for K-12 Schools | COVID-19 | CDC](#)). **The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) is providing UPDATED Public Health Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 transmission in Mississippi K-12 school settings aligned with the CDC guidance. The guidance is intended to supplement, not replace, the CDC guidance and provide MSDH specific recommendations for continued in-person classes for the 2021-2022 school year.** Please review the CDC guidance in addition to the MSDH guidance in this document. Guidance will continue to be updated as new information and recommendations are available.

Introduction

Mississippi continues to experience substantial and high levels of transmission of COVID-19, with increased cases, hospitalizations, and numerous outbreaks in multiple settings, including among students engaged in school sponsored activities and in school settings.

The primary driver of the increased cases, hospitalizations and deaths is the emergence of the new Omicron variant in Mississippi which is now the predominant strain in Mississippi. The Omicron variant is much more contagious and is more easily spread compared to other strains. While Omicron appears to result in a less severe illness, it is transmitting at an unprecedented high rate, which will ultimately result in increased hospitalizations and deaths.

The overwhelming majority of cases, hospitalizations and deaths are among unvaccinated persons, though there have been some infections, hospitalizations and deaths seen in fully vaccinated persons. **Some fully vaccinated persons who become infected may be contagious.**

We anticipate there will continue to be numerous cases and outbreaks in the school setting, which will lead to disruptions in both in-person classes and extracurricular activities. While students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction continues to be a priority, schools need to be prepared now for the continued surge in transmission we anticipate over the coming weeks. Each school/school district should continue to put in place measures to reduce transmission and maintain a safe school environment.

NEW: Updates to the MSDH Public Health Guidance and Recommendations:



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1. Updated guidance for eligibility of COVID-19 vaccine and booster doses, including what constitutes *up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations*.
2. Modifications to the eligibility of school-based screening programs to include any individual not up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations
3. Updated COVID-19 guidance for isolation and quarantine based on the newest CDC guidance for school settings.
 - a. Includes who should be quarantined after exposure based on their vaccination status and timeframe for quarantine (including in an outbreak setting).
 - b. Includes shortened isolation period for individuals infected with COVID-19.
4. An additional testing option (Phase 3) to utilize home tests for quarantined individuals to return to school safely after a shortened quarantine period.

MSDH Public Health Guidance

I. Vaccination

MSDH recommends that all eligible students, teachers, and staff 5 years of age and older receive COVID-19 vaccination.

Vaccination remains the primary public health prevention strategy to end transmission and allow for safe participation of in-person classes and school sponsored extracurricular activities. Schools should continue to promote COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible students, teachers, and staff.

COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for the following groups:

- Everyone 5 years and older is recommended to receive a primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine to be considered fully vaccinated.
- For children 5 years through 17 years of age, a primary series consists of 2 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. For persons 18 and older, a primary series consists of:
 - A 2-dose series of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna),
or
 - A single-dose COVID-19 vaccine (Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine)

CDC and MSDH recommend that all individuals stay *up to date* with vaccinations. Booster doses are recommended for ages 12 and older when eligible. For purposes of this K-12 school guidance, an individual is considered *up to date if*:

- You are ages 18 or older and have received all recommended doses, including booster doses, or
- You are ages 5-17 years and completed the primary series of COVID-19 vaccines.

See the CDC guidance at [Stay Up to Date with Your Vaccines | CDC](#) for recommended primary series of vaccines and eligibility for booster doses.



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MSDH is committed to facilitating on-site COVID-19 vaccinations for all interested schools through the development of an Adopt-a-school program. MSDH is working to put in place partnerships with local providers and healthcare systems through the COVID-19 Community Vaccination Partnership (CCVP) to directly provide COVID-19 vaccinations to all eligible students, teachers, and staff so all schools and school districts have the opportunity to have COVID-19 vaccinations available.

When a local provider partners with an adopted school, barriers are removed.

- All students, teachers, and staff 5 years old and above have access to vaccinations regardless of socioeconomic status.
- Parents do not have to search or disrupt normal routines to locate appropriate vaccine and provider.
- Schools can choose dates that best accommodate the school schedule.

School/School Districts Role

- Partnership to ensure appropriate school age children have access to the Covid-19 Vaccine.
- Help obtaining consent from parental guardians.
- Designation of space for a vaccination clinic at your location.
- Support from trusted members of the educational community and school board.

Please visit <https://msdh.ms.gov/AdoptASchool> for additional details about the Adopt-a-school program. If your school or school district has interest in participating in onsite COVID-19 vaccinations for all eligible students, teachers, and staff, email your interest with the name of your school/school district and point of contact to Covid19vaccine@msdh.ms.gov

II. Universal Indoor Mask Use

Consistent with CDC Public Health Guidance, MSDH continues to strongly recommend universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors (2 years of age and older) to K-12 school settings when not eating or drinking, regardless of vaccination status.

Consistent and correct mask use by all students, teachers, staff, and visitors regardless of vaccination status is vital to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Children younger than 2 years should not wear a mask.

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors, but masks should be considered in crowded outdoor settings or during activities of close prolonged contact with other students/teachers.

III. Physical Distancing



MSDH recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classroom settings, combined with universal indoor mask wearing, to reduce transmission risk.

MSDH recommends at least 6 feet of physical distancing and universal indoor mask wearing in all other indoor circumstances.

This guidance is made with an understanding of the potential physical constraints and other barriers in classroom settings when providing in-person classes for all students.

IV. Screening Testing *

MSDH recommends routine screening testing of all *asymptomatic* students, teachers, and staff who are *not up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations* as an additional measure to prevent further transmission.

Persons considered *not up to date* with vaccinations:

- Individuals 5 and older who are not vaccinated or who have not completed the primary series of COVID-19 vaccines, or
- 18 years of age or older and have completed the primary series, but have not received a booster shot when eligible, as follows:
 - Received two doses of mRNA vaccine over 5 months ago, but have not received a booster dose when eligible.
 - Received a single dose of Johnson and Johnson vaccine over two months ago and have not received the recommended booster dose when eligible.

Screening testing can identify potential cases and prompt rapid isolation and quarantine of individuals exposed to COVID-19 who are *not up to date* with vaccinations.

MSDH School Based Screening Testing Initiative

MSDH has developed a School Based Screening Testing Initiative to facilitate onsite screening testing for all unvaccinated asymptomatic students and teachers/staff at interested schools and school districts.

The program has two phases.

- In Phase 1, MSDH directly provides interested school districts with COVID-19 rapid tests for schools to conduct individual screening tests. More information can be obtained at [School-Based COVID-19 Testing Initiative - Mississippi State Department of Health \(ms.gov\)](https://www.ms.gov).
- In Phase 2, vendor agreements managed by MSDH will support on-site school-based testing for all interested schools and school districts. Every school district and school in the state



will be contacted by the vendor to determine their interest in participation and discuss enrollment in Phase 2 for screening testing as outlined above.

Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the MSDH School Based Testing Initiative are completely voluntary for all schools and students/teachers and staff.

Recommended algorithm for schools and school districts engaged in screening testing:

- Weekly screening of all interested **asymptomatic** teachers, staff, or students who are **not up to date with vaccinations**.
- Weekly screening of **asymptomatic** students (and teachers/coaches) who are **not up to date with vaccinations** participating in school sponsored extracurricular activities of any type, including sports, as a condition of participation (school district decision).
- Schools receiving BinaxNOW Rapid Antigen tests (or other available rapid antigen tests provided by MSDH) through Phase 1 of the MSDH School Based Screening Testing Initiative may also utilize these tests to:
 - Test asymptomatic students/teachers and staff who are on quarantine at day 5 of their quarantine period.
 - If the individual tests negative or is not tested but is asymptomatic, they may return to the school setting after 5 days of quarantine. The individual must continue to mask for an additional 5 days.
- Schools participating in Phase 2 screening testing with the MSDH vendor (Maverick) will work with the vendor to provide testing to students, staff, and teachers on quarantine as the testing schedule permits:
 - Testing asymptomatic students/teachers and staff who are on quarantine at day 5 of their quarantine period.
 - If the individual tests negative or is not tested but is asymptomatic, they may return to the school setting after 5 days of quarantine. The individual must continue to mask for an additional 5 days.
 - Quarantined students, staff, and teachers participating in this testing must have a signed consent form in order to be tested.

Additional Considerations:

- *Students and teachers/staff who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations (2 weeks after completion of one-dose or two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series) do not require weekly asymptomatic screening.*
- Screening testing is not designed for symptomatic individuals. Any symptomatic student or teacher/staff should continue to be excluded from school/school district and be evaluated by their primary medical provider.



Managing Positive and Negative Tests in School Based Screening Testing

Positive Screening Tests

- Asymptomatic individuals who test positive with a screening test should be excluded from the school setting for 5 days from the date of the test as long as they remain asymptomatic. If they develop symptoms, they should be excluded for an additional 5 days from the onset of symptoms and are fever free for 24 hours before returning. The individual must wear a mask for an additional 5 days.
- Asymptomatic individuals with a positive rapid antigen test who have a negative molecular based COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the rapid positive do not require further exclusion and may return to the school setting. This only applies to molecular based tests (i.e., PCR) and does not include an additional antigen test or antibody tests.

Negative Screening Tests

- Asymptomatic individuals with a negative rapid screening test may continue in-person classes and extracurricular activities.

NEW: Phase 3 Home Tests for Exposure / Close Contact Quarantine

K-12 schools can enroll in the School Based Testing Initiative to address students and staff who are on quarantine because of a school-based exposure. Schools participating in Phase 3 will be provided At-Home Tests for the school to distribute to exposed students and staff. The at-home over the counter test is to be used at day 5 of quarantine in order to safely return to school. Schools can enroll in Phase 3 in addition to Phase 1 or 2. .

All K-12 districts / schools are eligible to enroll in Phase 3, to include those that are currently enrolled and participating in Phase 1 or 2. Districts / school not currently participating in Phases 1 or 2 can also choose to enroll in Phase 3 only, if interested.

MSDH will provide Home Tests to schools free of charge. The tests can be utilized as follows:

1. Students, teachers or staff who are on home quarantine as a result of school exposure can be sent home with an over the counter home test.
2. The parent (or staff member) is instructed to test with the home test on day 5 of the quarantine period.
3. If the home test is negative, and the individual remains asymptomatic, they can return to school if they adhere to strict mask use for an additional 5 days.

The Phase 3 program is voluntary, testing is not required to end at home quarantine at day 5, but can be utilized to provide additional safeguards and reduce transmission in the school setting. Schools are not required to report individual positives, but are asked to report



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aggregate numbers on a weekly basis, and include any positives with home tests in students or staff in the weekly reports to MSDH.

No reimbursement will be provided in Phase 3.

To enroll in Phase 3, please send your request to the following email address: COVIDschoolreporting@msdh.ms.gov. The following information must be submitted with your request:

- School name, address, and shipping address
- School point of contact and contact information
- Total number of students
- Total number of all teachers, faculty, and school employees

Please allow 3-7 business days to receive your kits.

V. **Isolation, Contact Tracing, Quarantine, and Identifying Exposed Individuals**

MSDH recommends all schools continue to isolate and exclude COVID-19 infected students, teachers, and staff and continue contact tracing to identify exposed individuals for quarantine and exclusion from the school setting.

COVID-19 Infected Individuals and Isolation Period

- **People who have tested positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should immediately be excluded from the school setting and self-isolate for at least 5 days.** The individual can return to school if all the following are met:
 - The individual has no symptoms, or their symptoms are resolving after 5 days
 - The individual has been fever free for 24 hours without the use of any fever-reducing medication
 - The individual must continue to wear a mask for 5 additional days
 - During day 6-10, masks must be worn at all times in school and extracurricular activities with the exception of outdoor activities where participants are 6 feet apart.
- Asymptomatic individuals with a positive rapid COVID-19 test who have a negative molecular based COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the rapid positive do not require further exclusion and may return to the school setting. This only applies to molecular based tests as the confirmatory testing (i.e., PCR) and does not include antigen test or antibody tests.

Contact Identification (Exposed Individuals)

MSDH recommends schools continue **Contact Tracing** to identify all individuals who are in close contact to COVID-19 within the school setting or in extracurricular activities.



COVID-19 Exposure Definition: The current definition of exposure to COVID-19 remains 15 minutes of cumulative contact over a 24-hour period at <6 feet. An infected person can spread COVID-19 up to 2 days before they have symptoms or 2 days prior to positive test if they have no symptoms, therefore, contacts should be identified who were exposed up to 2 days prior to onset or test date accordingly.

Who does not have to quarantine after exposure as defined above:

Individuals who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines or have recent infection in the prior 90 days do not have to quarantine (as follows):

- People who are 18 years or older and have received all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses, including booster doses if eligible.
- People ages 5-17 years who have completed the primary series of COVID-19 vaccines.
- People with confirmed COVID-19 infection within the last 90 days.

Recommended actions for exposed persons who don't have to quarantine:

Even though these individuals do not have to quarantine after exposure, they should wear a well-fitting mask around others in the school setting and in public for 10 days after last exposure.

They should get tested at day 5 after last close contact with a COVID-19 infected person unless they have previously been infected in the last 90 days.

The following additional exceptions to recommended quarantine apply:

- In the **K–12 indoor classroom** setting or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with educator supervision), the close contact definition **excludes students** who were within **3 to 6 feet of an infected student** (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinically compatible illness](#)) where
 - both students were engaged in **consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks; and**
 - other **K–12 school prevention strategies** (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the **K–12 school setting**.
 - This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. See CDC guidance at [Appendices | CDC](#)
- If teachers/staff are identified as contacts who should be quarantined and excluded from the school setting, they may be allowed to continue to work if the school administration deems them essential to the operations, as long as:
 - The individual remains asymptomatic.
 - They wear a mask at all times while in indoor settings at the school.
 - They self-monitor for symptoms and not come to school if ill.
 - They self-quarantine at home at all other times.

Who should quarantine after exposure:



Students, teachers, and staff who are exposed to with someone with COVID-19 should quarantine if they are in one of the following groups (*not up to date with vaccines*):

- Ages 18 years or older and completed the primary series of recommended vaccine more than 5 months ago but have not received a recommended booster shot.
- Those who have received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine (completing the primary series) over 2 months ago and have not received a recommended booster shot.
- Those who are not fully vaccinated or have not completed a primary vaccine series.

Recommended actions for individuals who require quarantine after exposure:

- Stay home for 5 days. May return to school after 5 days if asymptomatic and adhere to strict mask use for an additional 5 days at least.
- Testing is recommended on day 5.
- If symptoms develop, get tested sooner and continue to stay home.

Testing is recommended on day 5 of quarantine. If the test is negative, they may return to the school setting if they remain asymptomatic and wear a mask for an additional 5 days. (Masks must be worn at all times in school and extracurricular activities with the exception of outdoor activities where participants are 6 feet apart.) If symptoms develop during quarantine, they should isolate and get tested immediately.

Quarantine Period Summary

- Wear a mask for 10 days
- Test on day 5, if possible, (unless there is a documented positive viral COVID-19 test in the last 90 days)
- If symptoms develop, get a test and stay home

Additional considerations and clarifications

- Students, teachers and staff who are quarantined and excluded from the school setting due to contact to a household member who is a case of COVID-19:
 - Immediately exclude a person in contact with a COVID-19 positive person on the first day of known exposure
 - The first day of the quarantine begins with the last day of exposure to the COVID-19 positive person
 - In the household setting, if the exposed person cannot be separated from the COVID-19 positive person, then the first day of quarantine starts after the COVID-19 positive person completes their 10-day isolation period.
 - Remember that fully vaccinated individuals are not required to quarantine. It is recommended to have a COVID-19 test 5 days after exposure. See additional exclusions to quarantine in the Contact Identification Section.
- **Recommendations for home-based tests:**



- **Individuals with a positive home-based test should be considered COVID-19 infected and should isolate as described in the guidelines above.**
- **Schools participating in Phase 3 Home Testing can elect to require a negative home-based test on day 5 of the quarantine period prior to the individual returning to the school setting. Through February 15, 2022 schools can receive home test kits directly from MSDH.**

VI. Outbreaks and School Dismissal Considerations

Outbreaks represent serious risk to the identified group and the broader community. When the outbreak threshold is reached in a defined group, the risk of exposure is significantly raised for the rest of the group; there may be as many unidentified cases already present in the group setting. The best way to prevent further transmission is to isolate those already known to be cases and quarantine those individuals within a group setting to reduce the risk of further spread from as of yet unrecognized cases.

MSDH recommends the following considerations for outbreaks and school dismissals:

- **Outbreaks: An outbreak is defined as ≥ 3 cases of COVID-19 in a classroom or group (sports team, group activity, band, or other) of 30 or less or 10% or more of larger groups within a 14-day period.**
 - In an outbreak setting, quarantine and exclusion from the school setting is recommended for students, teachers and staff that meet the definition for required quarantine in the previous section.
 - These individuals should home quarantine for at least 5 days. After 5 days, they may return to the school setting if asymptomatic. A test at day 5 of quarantine is recommended.
- **School Dismissal Considerations: The school may consider dismissal of the entire student/faculty under the following conditions:**
 - If ≥ 3 individual classroom settings, defined groups, or defined buildings are experiencing simultaneous outbreaks, or
 - If multiple absentees or exclusions of students and staff are leading to disruptions in on-campus functioning and impacting the learning environment as determined by the school.
 - If dismissal is decided upon by the school/school district,
 - Consider exclusion of participation in extracurricular and other school activities.
 - The dismissal timeframe is ideally 14 days; however, schools may consider returning at 10 days from the date the last COVID-19 case was at the school during their infectious period in lieu of the 14-day period.

VII. Exclusion When Sick



All students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of any infectious illness, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home from school and be evaluated by their healthcare provider.

Students, teachers, and staff should not be allowed to return to school until symptom and fever free for at least 24 hours, or if COVID-19 is diagnosed, until the isolation criteria for return to school are met.

VIII. Reporting

Mississippi K-12 schools are required to provide weekly reports of cases among students, teachers and staff, number of outbreaks, and teachers and students under quarantine as a result of COVID-19 exposure. An outbreak in a school setting is defined as 3 or more individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 in the same group within a 14-day period. Please utilize the attached survey to report <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MSDHDData>

Note: Schools participating in Phase 1 of the testing initiative are also required to report individual test results through Simple Report for each test they conduct.

IX. Example Letters for Isolation and Quarantine for school Use

See the next pages for example letters for utilization by schools when communicating with parents/students.



COVID-19 Case letter Guidance for Individuals with COVID-19 in the School Setting

Dear Parent/Teacher/Staff member,

You have reported to the school that you or your child have recently tested positive for COVID-19. Please see the following instructions:

- You or your child may not return to the school setting until 5 days from the day your symptoms started. If you or your child had no symptoms, you may not return until 5 days from the date of the positive test.
- The individual who tested positive should remain isolated at home for the 5-day period. Stay away from all persons at your home. Do not leave your house, or come in contact with anyone, including the people you live with.
- If you do have household contacts, you must limit exposure to them. Stay in a specific room away from others in your home. Additional CDC guidance may be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>.
- After 5 days you must also be fever-free for at least 24 hours (without fever-reducing medication) with improvement of symptoms prior to returning to school.
- To return to the school setting after the 5 days of isolation, you must continue to wear a mask for an additional 5 days. (Masks must be worn at all times in school and extracurricular activities with the exception of outdoor activities where participants are 6 feet apart.)
- A negative test will not be required prior to return to school as long as the above criteria are met.
- A note from your physician is not required for return to school.

For additional information please see:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- Mississippi State Department of Health [https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/ static/14,0,420.html](https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/static/14,0,420.html)
- [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC](#)



COVID-19 Close Contacts Letter Notification/Guidance for Close Contacts to COVID-19 in the School Setting

Dear Parent/Teacher/Staff,

You or your child have been identified as a close contact to a case of COVID-19 in the school setting. A close contact is defined as any individual within 6 feet of the infected person for at least 15 minutes or greater (cumulative) while the COVID-19 infected person is contagious. An infected person can spread SARS-CoV-2 starting 2 days before they have any symptoms (or, for asymptomatic people, 2 days before the positive specimen collection date). Based on this close contact the following instructions are provided.

For 5 days* following potential exposure, you, or your child:

- Will be excluded from the school setting for a minimum of 5 days after last exposure to the case of COVID-19.
- Should remain quarantined at home for 5 days after your (or your child's) last exposure to the case.
- Are recommended to be tested on day 5.
- Should monitor for symptoms and if symptoms develop, get tested and see a medical provider for evaluation.
- May return to school following the 5-day quarantine and school exclusion period if no symptoms develop.
- To return to the school setting after the 5 days of quarantine, you must continue to wear a mask for an additional 5 days. (Masks must be worn at all times in school and extracurricular activities with the exception of outdoor activities where participants are 6 feet apart.)
- ***Fully vaccinated (and boosted if eligible) persons in close contact with an infected person do NOT have to quarantine unless they develop symptoms (fully vaccinated persons are recommended to receive COVID-19 testing 5 days after exposure to rule out infection).***
- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 90 days and recovered do not have to quarantine or get tested again as long as they do not develop new symptoms.

For additional information please see:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- Mississippi State Department of Health https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,420.html