

School Closure COVID-19 Guidance

This document provides decision-making guidance for districts and schools, which mirrors guidance issued by the CDC and Tennessee Department of Health. Health-related school closure decisions are made at the local level, and in all cases, we encourage district leaders to work in close coordination with your local health department to discuss decisions related to school closure and cancellation of planned events or trips.

In all cases, clear and rational decision-making and communication with all stakeholders is critical. Families need to know who is making decisions and what those decisions are.

All schools and districts should continue to follow guidance to prevent the spread of disease:

- **Principals and District Leaders should make clear to parents, students and staff that they are to stay home if they are not feeling well and should not return until they feel well without the use of medication. There should be NO exceptions to this policy.**
- District administrations are advised to consider leniencies in student absentee policies and provide sufficient sick leave time to staff to permit ill students to remain home until free of symptoms for 72 hours or completing directed quarantine or isolation, whichever is longer.
- Encourage personal protective measures (handwashing, social distancing). Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces multiple times per day. Ensure hand hygiene supplies are readily available and in adequate supply for students and staff.

If your school does not have a lab-confirmed case or suspected case of COVID-19

- School operations should continue as normal.

If a staff member or student presents COVID-19 symptoms at school or a school event

- Establish procedures to help sick staff or students separate from others as soon as possible and be sent home immediately. Staff assisting such patients should be masked. Find a place away from high-traffic areas for isolating the person and provide them with clean, disposable facemask to wear, if available, until they can be transported home.
- Individuals who are sick and/or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should isolate at home and follow CDC [guidance](#) to seek medical care. The Tennessee Department of Health has a public information hotline at 877-857-2945, available 10 am- 10 pm.

If your school has a suspected case of COVID-19 that has not yet been lab-confirmed

- School operations should continue as normal.
- The ill individual should be isolated at home. If COVID-19 symptoms are present (e.g. difficulty breathing, fever, cough) the individual should call their health care provider to determine next steps and whether testing may be needed.

If a student or staff member is a contact to an individual who has been quarantined (an individual who has been exposed to a confirmed or suspected case but who is not currently ill)

- Individuals who have been in contact with a person in quarantine do NOT pose a threat. Districts are not advised to close schools unless a school has been notified of a lab-confirmed COVID-19 illness in a student or staff member who was in the building or attended a school-based event.

If your school has a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19

- District leadership should contact local public health officials immediately to make decisions regarding closings.
- School will likely require temporary closure (2-5 days) while contacts are quarantined and investigated for symptoms, interactions, and testing completed. This decision should be made in consultation with public health and does not constitute an emergency.
- **Presence of lab-confirmed COVID-19 illness in one school does not automatically trigger closure at a district level.** Please consult with public health officials prior to making district-wide decisions to close schools, as social mixing may still occur outside of school with less ability to monitor and may potentially spread disease to elderly caregivers. Additionally, district-level closures could impose a hardship on families who may have food insecurity and working parents.

If your school has multiple cases of lab-confirmed COVID-19

- Consult with local public health officials to determine if broader and/or longer-term school dismissals are necessary as a preventative measure.
- Cancel school-associated congregations, particularly those with involving individuals with weakened ability to fight infection and the elderly.
- In the case of school closure, prioritize the continuation of instruction and implement distance learning where feasible.

Definitions for this guidance:

- **Social distancing**, or avoiding close contact with others, is recommended. Public health professionals recommend a distance of 3-6 feet be maintained between individuals, where possible, and recommend forgoing personal contact like handshakes.
- **Contacts** are individuals who may have come in contact or had in-person interactions with an individual with a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19.
- **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.

Additional Contact Information:

- Tennessee Department of Health hotline: 877-857-2945 Available 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. CST Daily
- Tennessee Department of Education hotline: 833-947-2115 Available 6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CST Monday- Friday
- Tennessee Department of Education email address: K12.health@tn.gov
- Guidance from Tennessee Department of Health website: <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov.html>
- Guidance from Tennessee Department of Education website: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>
- Contact your local health department for additional guidance.