

## Tool for Public Health Staff Responding to Common Cluster Surveillance Questions

### What is the definition of a COVID-19 cluster?

A **confirmed COVID-19 cluster** is two (2) or more confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 that are linked by the same location of exposure (e.g., workplace, long-term care facility, grocery store, etc.) or exposure event (e.g., work party, vacation, etc.) within a 14-day period that is **not a household or school-associated exposure**.

A **confirmed school-associated cluster** is three (3) or more confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 within a specified core group (e.g., extracurricular activity, classroom, etc.) who were physically present during a core group activity in the 14 days prior to illness onset or positive test result. For additional information on school cluster definitions, please see [Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists \(CSTE\) Guidance](#).

A **watch list cluster** is one (1) confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in a non-school setting **or** two or more COVID-19 cases in a school setting where a confirmed link between cases cannot be identified.

### How do I know when to attribute a case to a facility or setting?

For **long-term care facilities (LTCFs)\***: Resident cases are attributed to a facility's cluster count if the resident tested positive or developed symptoms  $\geq 15$  days after admission. Staff cases should be counted towards a facility's count if the staff member worked at the facility five (5) days prior to testing positive or symptom onset, whichever is the earliest date.

*\*These timeframes only apply to attributing cases to a cluster and should not be considered guidelines for facility testing and infection control recommendations. For additional information on response activities in LTCFs, please refer to [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\) standards on facility testing](#) or review the responses to healthcare specific questions below.*

For **school settings**: a school-associated case will be defined as a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case who was physically present in a school or extracurricular activity in the **14 days prior** to their illness (or positive test result).

For **non-school and non-long-term care facilities** (LTCFs): cases will be attributed to a facility or setting where the patient was located five (5) days prior to symptom onset date or specimen collection date (if asymptomatic).

Any individual confirmed and probable cases resulting from **secondary transmission** from an outbreak-associated case in a family member or close contact of a worker who is not employed by the business/ employer should not be classified as outbreak-associated and not included in outbreak case count.

### **What guidance should be provided to a facility with a cluster involving healthcare personnel?**

Identification of a positive healthcare worker in a nursing home or long-term care facility will require outbreak response testing at the facility as outlined in [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services guidance](#) (QSO-20-38-NH). Facilities should refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for updated guidance on [managing healthcare personnel with SARS-CoV-2 infection or exposure to SARS-CoV-2](#).

### **What if assistance or education is needed for clusters involving healthcare personnel and/or regarding infection control practices at a facility?**

If assistance is needed at a facility regarding infection control practices or healthcare staffing concerns, please email [HAI.Health@tn.gov](mailto:HAI.Health@tn.gov) and [COVID19.Cluster@tn.gov](mailto:COVID19.Cluster@tn.gov). Someone from the Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAI) team will reach out to you.

### **When can a cluster investigation be “closed”?**

A cluster investigation can be considered “closed” after two (2) incubation periods (28 days) have passed since the last exposure with no new cases identified within that period of time. Some cluster response activities may be discontinued prior to the administrative closure of a cluster. For example, outbreak testing in nursing homes can be stopped when no new cases are identified at least 14 days since the most recent positive test result.