Facemasks / Face Shields

Is wearing a facemask safe?
Children aged 2 or older can safely wear a cloth face covering for an extended period. Cloth face coverings are made from breathable materials that will not block oxygen or lead to carbon dioxide poisoning. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers some MythBusters about wearing face coverings. The CDC provides some adaptations and alternatives when wearing a face covering may not be possible.

Why is it important to wear a cloth facemask if I am already social distancing?
Wearing a cloth facemask and social distancing each can decrease the risk of viral transmission. When used together, the risk of transmission is even lower. Using a multi-layered approach can slow and even stop the spread of the virus.

Should students wear masks while playing on the playground/sports?
If students can stay 6 feet apart on an outdoor playground or participating in sports, they would not need to wear masks. However, if they are playing in clusters, they would need to wear masks. Examples: playing together on the monkey bars, playing basketball, building pyramids while cheering. The risk of spreading COVID-19 is much lower outside, but not zero, especially when students are not social distancing.

Does increasing distance eliminate the need for facemasks in the classroom?
Increasing the distance between individuals is helpful, but teachers and students should wear facemasks while others are in the room. The risk of transmission decreases with more distance and less time exposure but still exists. Here are some Additional Considerations for the Use of Cloth Face Coverings Among K12 Students.

Can a face shield be used in place of a facemask?
A face shield is not a substitute for a cloth face covering but wearing a face shield in addition to a cloth face covering is acceptable. A face shield primarily provides eye protection for the wearer. The CDC does not currently recommend using face shields as a substitute for masks. There is not enough evidence to support the effectiveness of face shields for controlling the respiratory spread.

Is a face shield acceptable when working with deaf or hard of hearing students?
In this situation, consider using a clear mask. If a clear mask isn’t available, consider whether you can use written communication, use closed captioning, or decrease background noise to
Case and Close Contact Definitions:

Confirmed Case:
Someone who has had a positive confirmatory PCR or NAAT test.

Probable Case:
Someone who has not had a positive confirmatory test, but 1) has a positive antigen test OR 2) meets the clinical criteria for COVID-19 infection AND is a close contact to a case. Someone with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 but no direct exposure to a known case is not considered a probable case.

Close Contact:
Someone who has been within 6 feet of a case for a cumulative total of > 15 min over a 24-hour period. However, this depends on the exposure level and setting. Examples:

- Any duration of an aerosol-generating procedure in a healthcare setting without proper personal protective equipment (PPE) may be defined as close contact.
- Extremely close proximity in the setting of high-risk activities (forceful respiratory air propulsion like cough/sneeze/heavy breathing during sports activities; kissing; sharing utensils or drinking after a case) may qualify someone as a close contact even though the contact was for a shorter period of time.

Chain of Events when learning of a COVID-19 Case:

When a school staff member hears of a confirmed case of COVID-19, they should notify the school nurse or designated school liaison and share the following information:

- Student/Staff name and contact information
- If available, the date the case first developed symptoms or the date tested if they did not have symptoms.
- The date the case last attended school
- If the individual is currently in attendance at school, that individual should be provided a cloth face covering (if not already wearing one) and taken to the isolation room previously designated by the school until they can be transported from the building. All infection prevention protocols should be followed.

When the school nurse or designated school liaison is notified of a confirmed case of COVID-19, that staff member should gather the following information and inform the District Superintendent’s office liaison:

- Individual’s name and contact information
- The date the case first developed symptoms or date tested if they did not have symptoms
- The date the case last attended school
- Class schedule
Locate the seating chart for each class – Gather names of the students seated within six feet of the confirmed case. The Health Department (HD) may request the school notify close contacts and ask them to remain at home until the HD investigation is complete.

When the district liaison is notified of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school, that staff member should contact their counterpart at the local health department and provide the following information:

- Student/Staff name and contact information
- The date the case first developed symptoms or date tested if they did not have symptoms
- The date the case last attended school
- Names (parent name) and contact information of identified close contacts
- Contact information of the school nurse or designated school liaison

Additionally, the liaison should communicate to the school any Health Department recommendations for mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in the school.

**Contact Tracing / Household Contacts**

When a teacher is roaming the class for more than 15 minutes and a student in the class is determined to be a case, is the teacher considered a close contact?

Since specific circumstances will vary in each situation, discussing the exposure information with the Health Department will assist in their determination regarding the possible need for quarantine.

How can a class of students be protected from a teacher who becomes positive?

Only if the teacher was within 6 feet of an individual student for a cumulative total of > 15 minutes over a 24-hour period would a student be considered a close contact. In this type of situation, you should consider the other measures taken in the class. If the teacher and students were wearing masks, the risk is lower. If the teacher remained at the front of the classroom, not spending extended time slowly wandering through the classroom, the risk is lowered even further. A useful approach would be asking the teacher to identify anyone who qualified for the above definition of close contact. We would recommend notifying all of the families of students in the class of the low-risk exposure, but rather than quarantining everyone; it would be reasonable to ask them to actively monitor for symptoms. At the first sign of symptoms, the student would need to stay home and is considered a probable case until proven otherwise.

How do we approach contact tracing for children playing together at recess or when seating charts have not been followed?

It is a good idea to cohort students both in the classroom and on the playground. That will help when the need arises for contact tracing. In instances such as recess contacts, using the COVID-19 Case Response Rubric may be helpful. The COVID-19 Case Response Rubric has been updated, so check your version if you are using a printed copy.

**What is a “Household Contact without Ongoing Exposure”?**

Household exposure is not considered ongoing if:

- The case is never in the same room as others in the home.
- There are no shared plates/cups/dishes/phones.
• The case does not share a bathroom with others in the home. If that isn’t possible, extreme vigilance in cleaning is important.

As long as the case and household members remain separated, the household member’s quarantine can begin after their last close contact with the case.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19 through the health department, will the school be notified?

When the health department becomes aware of a positive school-aged case, the case investigator communicates with the parents of the case about known close contacts and whether the child was physically present at school within 48 hours of testing. If the student did attend school onsite during that time period, the investigator contacts the school to further identify close contacts based on the school’s knowledge of classes attended, seating charts, and other factors. The Department of Health is responsible for notifying those contacts, though the school may be asked to assist in notification.

Can we disclose a student’s personal identification information (PII) to the local health department for contact tracing?

School officials should work with their state and local public health officials to determine the information needed to address this public health concern. As COVID-19 is a reportable disease, schools should release PII to local, regional, or state public health officials in order to minimize delays in contact tracing and notifying and quarantining close contacts. Understanding how, what, and when information can be shared is a critical part of preparedness. FERPA has provided Questions and Answers on the applicability of FERPA to Disclosures Related to COVID-19 that may help your agency determine when to release PII to the health department.

What if a parent of a student who tested positive for COVID-19 refuses to provide written consent to release personal identification information (PII) to the public health department?

FERPA permits educational agencies and institutions to release PII without consent to health departments, when necessary, to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals. If your agency releases the PII of a student to the health department, with or without consent, make a note in the individual student’s record that PII was disclosed to the health department. FERPA has provided Questions and Answers on the applicability of FERPA to Disclosures Related to COVID-19 that may help your agency determine when to release PII to the health department.

What information can the health department share with a school?

Protected health information, such as the individual’s identity or details of their condition that may cause them to be identified, may not be shared. Only general information that will enable appropriate decision making may be shared. A health department may inform a school or district of the need for a student to be excused from school until a given date. In the event a case/contact is not complying with isolation/quarantine, a public health official may issue a health directive that requires the individual to comply with an isolation/quarantine order.

What should schools do about contact tracing when health department capacity is limited?

Districts can assist their local health departments by notifying identified close contacts, asking them to stay away from school, and notifying public health. Ultimately, it is the local public health department’s responsibility to perform contact tracing and make determinations of who
must quarantine. Any initial assistance the district can provide greatly improves this process and prevents ongoing exposures in schools. Tennessee Department of Health Recommendations for Management of COVID-19 in Schools > Mitigating Spread of COVID-19 in Your School > Facilitate Contact Tracing: Contact your local health department as soon as you are made aware of a suspect or confirmed case of COVID-19. Assist the health department in identifying contacts of the infected individual. The Case Interview Script for LEAs may be helpful in identifying contacts of the infected individual. Contacts are to self-quarantine for at least 14 days from their last contact with the infected individual.

Isolation / Quarantine / Testing

Can an asymptomatic person infect others?
Yes. If someone is positive for COVID-19 but not experiencing symptoms, they can still transmit the virus. This question reinforces the importance of wearing face coverings, as someone who is without symptoms may be unaware they are infectious and able to transmit the virus with others. Face covering decreases the risk of transmission.

Can an asymptomatic student / staff member with COVID-19 return to school before their 10-day isolation period is complete?
The minimum 10-day isolation period is not optional. Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 must isolate for a period of 10 days from the onset of their symptoms (or the date they were tested if they are asymptomatic) AND must be fever-free (without the use of fever-reducing medications) AND have improvement in symptoms for at least 24 hours. The CDC offers an article on Evidence Supporting Transmission of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 While Presymptomatic or Asymptomatic.

Is a person who still has a headache and cough at the end of the 10-day isolation still considered contagious?
A person with lingering, mild symptoms lasting longer than 10 days after illness onset would not be considered contagious.

Why are we quarantining healthy children?
Quarantine is used for healthy individuals who have been exposed to a case and are, therefore, at risk of becoming infectious themselves. The length of quarantine is based on the incubation period of the infectious agent. In the case of COVID-19, this is up to 14 days following exposure. If you are a close contact, a 14-day quarantine period is recommended. Alternatives to the 14-day quarantine period can be found in TDH Quarantine Guidelines.

MUST students adhere to quarantine guidelines if they are asymptomatic?
Yes. By definition, individuals in quarantine are asymptomatic. If an individual has close contact with a confirmed case and is symptomatic, that individual meets the public health definition of a probable case and must isolate. The purpose of quarantine is to keep those who have been exposed to the virus away from others while they are potentially incubating the virus and infectious. Quarantine is a measure that is critical to mitigating the spread of infectious disease outbreaks. CDC guidance is here for your review: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html.
How can we prevent quarantining students multiple times?
Practicing social distancing is imperative. Decreasing the frequency of contact and exposure distance can prevent quarantine. Remind and encourage students, staff, and parents to follow the 6 feet for ≥ 15-minute rule to protect themselves. Social distancing is challenging, but it will prevent students and staff from being quarantined.

What can school directors do when parents refuse to quarantine their children?
Continue to reinforce the importance of quarantine, reminding parents this strategy is necessary for fighting the virus. There is a plethora of information on CDC’s website about the importance of quarantine and a library of resources on our site for educators.
Work with your local health department and remind parents if they want to keep schools open, it’s best to participate in quarantine voluntarily.

If one person in a house is quarantined, does everyone living in the house quarantine too?
The need to quarantine only applies to the person who is a known close contact to a COVID case. We do not recommend quarantine for a “contact of a contact.” Since the risk of transmission is high in households, the quarantined person should be kept separated from the rest of the family as much as possible, avoiding shared bedrooms, bathrooms, or shared living areas. Limiting exposure in this way can help prevent transmission to other family members if the quarantined person were to become positive. Other family members may need to quarantine based on home exposure if the person who is quarantined tests positive or develops symptoms. Refer to TDH Quarantine Guidelines for more details.

Are there resources to cover cafeteria staff who are quarantined because one of their team has tested positive?
One of the practices some districts have used is identifying of 1-2 staff members from every school to be part of a “back-up” team that can be called upon when needed. This concern reinforces the importance of ensuring staff are able to physically distance themselves while at work.

What is the guidance for staff or students who were already infected with COVID-19?
Staff and students infected with COVID-19 in the past 90 days do not require quarantine when exposed to a new case of COVID-19. If they develop symptoms after the exposure, they should self-isolate until evaluated by a healthcare provider.

Staff and students who were infected with COVID-19 more than 90 days before being identified as a close contact to a new case (within 6 feet for a cumulative total of ≥ 15 minutes over a 24-hour period) should follow the same quarantine guidelines as someone who has never been infected: TDH Quarantine Guidelines

How should a school respond when a student returns to school with an alternate diagnosis from their healthcare provider but no negative COVID test?
We would encourage the school to share the Return to School Decision Support Algorithm with those healthcare providers. While TDH can share it with our licensed providers, reinforcing the message at the school level would be helpful as well.

If a football player is determined to be positive after a game, do both teams need to quarantine?
The entirety of both teams would most likely not need to quarantine, but certain players would require quarantine. Partnering with your regional medical officers to assist with these decisions is important. In making a determination, walk through opportunities for close contact with the positive student by using game footage. What position did the positive student play? Think through when and how other students might have come in contact with the positive student. Were they face-to-face on the scrimmage line? Did they ride on the same bus or share the same locker room? Did they share water bottles? Where do they stand on the sidelines? Were they standing with a specific group (e.g., the offensive line or special team players)? In some situations where players are in close proximity and yelling, the proximity may be more important than the amount of time. Think through the possibility of spread instead of using a stopwatch. Understanding how players come into close contact through the course of the game will help you identify opportunities to avoid some of those instances, reducing the need to quarantine players in the future.

What is meant by “schools MAY exclude students/staff at their discretion” in the Protocol for Schools Assisting Public Health with Close Contact Investigation for COVID-19 Cases?
Official decisions about the need for someone to quarantine come from the Department of Health. A school MAY exclude someone from campus out of concern they are a close contact to a case until that official decision is made by the Health Department. While schools can’t order quarantine or isolation for an individual (that also involves aspects of their life outside of their presence at school), they certainly can exclude a student or staff member from being present on school grounds during the time period they should be in quarantine or isolation.

How should we handle quarantine for students living on campus?
Quarantine is for individuals who have close contact with a case of COVID-19. These are some examples of campus situations that might be encountered:

- Roommate A has a fever. The school asks Roommate B to self-quarantine. Roommate A has an evaluation that includes a negative test and has another explanation for their illness. Roommate A does not need to isolate, and Roommate B does not need to quarantine.
- Roommate A was home over the weekend and their sibling, with whom they had close contact, tests positive, and now Roommate A has symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Roommate A is considered a probable case whether or not they have a negative test, so they will need to isolate. Roommate B has been exposed to a probable case and will need to quarantine.

Can college students isolate or quarantine together?
Students diagnosed with COVID-19 may isolate together. Students who are close contacts of someone diagnosed with COVID-19 should NOT quarantine together. Individuals in isolation may return to school after a period of at least 10 days after the onset of symptoms AND 24 hours without fever (without fever-reducing medication) AND improvement in symptoms.
Individuals who were severely ill or who are immunocompromised may require isolation for up to 20 days and should be advised by their physician.

How can a school use the BinaxNOW tests available through the TN Dept of Health? TDH guidance for Rapid COVID-19 Testing in Schools provides information about using these tests. Any school or school district interested in testing can contact COVID.Education@tn.gov.

Critical Infrastructure (CI)

MUST staff designated as CI obtain testing if they are considered a close contact? Yes. All requirements in the letter from Commissioners Piercey and Schwinn dated August 18, 2020, must be adopted for TDH to acknowledge CI designation.

What is the process to follow if our school or district is interested in having their CI designation acknowledged by TDH? Provide a copy of meeting minutes of the district’s governing body identifying which employees or contractors are to be deemed CI, approving such self-designation, and adopting the provisions of Attachment A to TDH by email at COVID.Education@tn.gov.

Can CI designated staff continue working pending test results? Yes, as long as they are not experiencing any symptoms.

If CI designated staff receive a negative test, MUST they restest within 3 days? CI designated staff would ONLY retest if the first test were negative, as a positive test would result in isolation and exclusion from school. TDH encourages these employees to be retested and considers this to be best practice.

Immunizations

Have the immunization requirements changed for students enrolled as distant learners? No new laws, rules, or regulations have been passed. TCA states that all children enrolled in public schools must meet immunization requirements, as outlined in this document. https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/rules/1200/1200-14/1200-14-01.20191013.pdf

International Travel

We have students returning from international countries. What is the quarantine time? CDC no longer recommends quarantining individuals returning from international travel. Those returning from travel should be aware they may be contagious and should social distance, wear a cloth facemask, wash their hands, and self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html

Data / Metrics

Is there a mandate for schools with a cluster of cases to go virtual for two weeks?
The decision regarding school closures or transition to a virtual learning environment is one made by the school and school district in consultation with the local Department of Health. The Department of Health has provided guidance to all public-school districts to assist them with this determination.

Where is information located about community spread of COVID 19 and its relationship to schools' safe operation?
TDH does not recommend the use of one specific metric as a threshold for opening/closing schools. Districts are encouraged to take multiple factors into account—new cases, test positivity rate, school absenteeism, ability to have staff on-site to safely operate schools, etc. Districts should consider numbers provided by their local health officials, the State, and what they know about their district. In addition to county-level numbers, school-age numbers are in the downloadable data sets section of the Department of Health's COVID page. This link will take you to the county map that is based upon the White House’s definition for yellow, orange, and red counties. These criteria should NOT be used as triggers for the opening or closing of schools, but rather to inform the district of measures they need to consider in order to maintain in-person learning. Epidemiology and Surveillance Data Dashboard

Is there a definition for low, moderate, or high community spread?
TDH, with TDOE, has established criteria for the management of cases within schools based upon what the White House defines as yellow, orange, and red levels of community spread. County identification based off these criteria can be found on the TDH website by clicking the 4th tab on the data maps (link https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov/data/maps.html) page. These data elements may be used to assist districts as they determine how to respond to cases within a school. They are not intended to be used to determine if a school will hold in-person instruction. In accordance with CDC and AAP guidance, most school districts will reopen in person, in order to holistically address the needs of children. The comparative risk determinations by county should be interpreted in the context of a community – risk varies among populations. Spread within a congregate living facility, for example, may or may not impact the risk of transmission to teachers, staff, and students. Given this, school districts are strongly advised to contact their local health departments for consultation as they are making these decisions. TDH and TDOE appreciate the strong relationship between local school districts and public health officers and recognize that regular communication is essential in decision making for districts and schools.

Classroom and Extra-Curricular Activities

What is the guidance for teaching in classrooms using shared items? For example, science labs or art classes?
- Ensure adequate supplies to minimize the sharing of materials to the extent possible (e.g., assigning each student their own art supplies, equipment) or limit the use of supplies and equipment by groups of students and clean and disinfect between use. CDC Guidelines
- Space the lab stations six feet apart with minimal sharing of equipment, unless wearing gloves. Have students wash hands upon entering and exiting the room.
- Have assigned seats to reduce the number of students required to quarantine in the event that someone in the class is diagnosed with COVID-19.
• Consider options such as plexiglass between students. If both students are behind plexiglass, both students are wearing facemasks, and student B tested positive, student A would not necessarily have to quarantine.

Is there current guidance on choir and drama practices?
Official guidance regarding music or drama classes is limited, but can be found on cdc.gov at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-staff.html#music-choir-arts. Other useful references:
https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3223
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7330568/

How should we clean and disinfect a classroom if a COVID-19 positive case was in the room?
Close the classroom for 24 hours to provide time for aerosolized particles to settle. After that time period, staff wearing re-usable (non-medical, multi-use) gloves, masks and eye protection can clean and disinfect desks, seats and high touch surfaces. The level of cleaning should not require hiring an outside cleaning service, a practice which could become quite costly as this type of cleaning may be needed several times throughout the school year. Useful guidance on cleaning and disinfecting is available on the CDC’s website:

What are best practices to hosting an awards banquet?
If possible, host awards events outdoors practicing social distancing. Encourage attendees to wear a face mask, cohort tables or seating by households and maintain distancing of at least 6 feet. Eliminate buffet lines and the use of shared objects. Remind participants not to shake hands, as is often done when receiving awards. Advise attendees to stay home if they are sick and offer online attendance options.

Can students in quarantine come to the school to take the ACT since it is a state scheduled test which is difficult to reschedule?
No, students in quarantine should not be allowed to take the ACT at school.

Screening / Monitoring / Temperature Checks

What should be communicated to parents, caregivers, or guardians regarding symptom and temperature screening of children before attending school?
Students who are sick should not attend in-person school, and parents should monitor for symptoms of infectious illness every morning including temperature checks.
• Note: On-site symptom and temperature screening for students is at the discretion of the school. Visit the CDC webpage for more information on screening K-12 students for symptoms of COVID-19.
How should we symptom screen our teachers, staff, and visitors?

Encourage staff to self-screen prior to coming onsite and if any of the following are present to not return to the workplace:

- Symptoms of COVID-19
- Fever equal to or higher than 100.4°F
- Under evaluation for COVID-19 (for example, waiting for the results of a viral test to confirm infection)
- Diagnosed with COVID-19 and not yet cleared to discontinue isolation