

# K12 & COVID-19

## Frequently Asked Questions



**Please see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Preparing for a Safe Return to School, Operating Schools During COVID-19* and other resources available at:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

Information in this document is current as of Oct. 2, 2020, and is subject to change.

New questions are highlighted in yellow. Modifications made to existing questions are not highlighted.

### Identifying Cases in Schools

**Q-1: If a parent, spouse or other household member that lives with a student or staff member tests positive, is this considered a confirmed case in the school?**

**A-1:** Assuming the infected individual did not enter the school, this would not be considered a confirmed case in the school. The student or staff member who lives with the infected individual would likely be considered a close contact. The Department of Health (DOH) recommends that the close contact self-quarantine for 14 days. Note: If the student or staff member develops symptoms and/or tests positive while in quarantine, a new case investigation and 10-day isolation period would begin.

**Q-2: If one student in a classroom tests positive for COVID-19, is everyone in that same classroom considered a close contact?**

**A-2:** Each positive case within a classroom will be investigated to determine if other students/staff are close contacts. The Centers for Disease Control defines a close contact as any individual who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from two days before illness onset or, for asymptomatic patients, two days prior to positive specimen collection until the time the patient is isolated. The DOH recommends that close contacts complete a 14-day quarantine period.

**Q-3: Will schools be notified if one of their staff or students is identified as a positive case or a close contact of someone testing positive for COVID-19?**

**A-3:** The DOH will notify the designated school point of contact (POC) of a positive case related to the school. Through the DOH investigation and in coordination with the school POC, school close contacts will be determined.

The process for school notification is as follows:

1. The DOH will notify the school POC of a positive case. Positive cases will be asked by DOH to isolate for 10 days.
2. The DOH will work closely with the school POC to identify close contacts. Close contacts will be asked by DOH to quarantine for 14 days.
3. Once close contacts are identified in coordination with school POC and DOH, the school *may* notify the identified close contacts using usual methods of parent/guardian contact. See sample letters provided by DOH. The school may include the following information:
  - Your child has been identified as a close contact by the DOH.
  - Your child should quarantine at home.
  - DOH will contact you for additional quarantine education and guidance.
4. Following the school's notification directing close contacts of the above information (#3), the DOH will contact all close contacts individually to provide education around quarantine, monitoring of symptoms, and provide close contact letter. The school is NOT responsible for conducting the contact tracing.

**Q-4: If one of our students lives and is tested in a different state but goes to school in a South Dakota school, will that student's positive test result still be reported to school officials?**

**A-4:** Investigation of a person positive for COVID-19 is completed by the public health agency in the state where the person resides. Schools can expect that public health agencies in surrounding states will follow protocol similar to that being used in South Dakota, meaning that a school should be notified of a positive case, even if the student lives in and is tested in another state.

**Q-5: If a school is notified mid-day of a positive case within a building, is the recommendation to immediately remove students from the impacted area for cleaning or wait until the end of the school day?**

**A-5:** Dismissal at the end-of-day is appropriate. However, many factors would go into the decision to close parts, or all, of a school building. Schools may make their own decisions regarding earlier dismissal.

**Q-6: If a student who is identified as a close contact by the DOH tests negative for COVID-19 during the 14-day quarantine period, can they return to school?**

**A-6:** If a student tests negative during their quarantine period, the DOH recommends that the student remain in quarantine until 14 days have passed since their last exposure.

**Q-7 removed**

**Q-8: What do we do if a student has tested positive for COVID-19, but their parent refuses to obey isolation orders (i.e. continues to send the child to school despite being told not to)?**

**A-8:** The school should work through the DOH person working the case to obtain a public health order. If the child continues to come to school, in violation of the public health order, the DOH may seek court enforcement of the order.

**Q-9: Will the DOH or DOE let school officials know when a student can return to school, whether they're a close contact or a confirmed case?**

**A-9:** The DOH will alert a school of any student in the school who has tested positive, but the department will not alert the school when an individual (positive case or close contact) is released from isolation or quarantine. DOH will provide a letter to positive cases who complete their isolation period indicating they can return to school. The DOH will also provide a letter to the close contacts at the beginning of their quarantine period which will identify the completion date for quarantine. Parents will be responsible to provide these letters to the school.

**Q-10: If a student comes to school exhibiting one of the current COVID symptoms and lives in an area of substantial spread, should I exclude the student from school?**

**A-10:** An individual displaying COVID symptoms who also meets possible exposure criteria should be directed to contact their healthcare provider for testing consideration. The DOH recommends that the individual be excluded until a negative test result is received OR if untested, excluded at least 10 days since symptom onset (and 24 hours without fever AND symptom improvement.)

### Critical Infrastructure/Essential Workers

**Q-1: Are school employees considered critical infrastructure workers? And does a declaration of such affect the 14-day quarantine period?**

**A-1:** Please refer to the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency guidance](#) on issues related to critical infrastructure. As a state, South Dakota has not identified critical infrastructure (or essential) workers. Identifying these essential workers is at the employer's discretion. UPDATE: As of mid-August, the federal government has advised that teachers are essential workers.

What does this mean? If a school identifies a staff member as a critical infrastructure, or essential, worker and that staff member is a close contact of a positive case but has *no symptoms*, the staff member may be able to continue working. This arrangement could take place as long as the staff member continues to remain asymptomatic, is monitoring for symptoms, and is wearing a face covering appropriately for 14 days following the exposure. If at any time during the 14 days the staff member develops symptoms, he/she should *not* be at work.

**Q-2: Does a school nurse who has been exposed to a positive COVID-19 case need to quarantine?**

**A-2:** The answer, in part, depends upon the personal protective equipment the individual was wearing during the exposure. Also, see Q-1 immediately above regarding essential workers. Finally, you should refer to [CDC's Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Work Restrictions for Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure to](#)

[COVID-19](#); see Guidance for Asymptomatic HCP (health care personnel) Who Were Exposed to Individuals with Confirmed COVID-19.

**Q-3: Should a staff member who is a close contact but considered critical infrastructure be required to test negative before returning to normal (pre-close contact) protocols?**

**A-3:** No. If a staff member is a close contact and considered critical infrastructure, they should monitor for symptoms, mask, and implement other prevention strategies. If that person remains asymptomatic, testing may be considered and can be discussed with a healthcare provider.

## Close Contacts

**Q-1: How is a close contact determined?**

**A-1:** CDC guidance states that a close contact is defined as any individual who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes. The DOH follows CDC guidance to determine close contacts. This guidance may not be inclusive of every scenario. Other factors are evaluated to determine close contacts such as the symptomology of the infected person, the individual's inherent risk, etc.

**Q-2: How soon will close contacts be notified by the Department of Health? What if someone who is considered a close contact shows up for school?**

**A-2** Typically, DOH staff begin reaching out within 24 hours of identification of a close contact. Some contacts may require additional time if staff are unable to connect, the person doesn't answer the call, or the staff have limited or no contact information. The DOH recommends that close contacts quarantine for 14 days.

**Q-3: What should I do during the time period between when I've been notified of a positive case in one of my buildings and before DOH has contacted me (as school point of contact) to discuss close contacts?**

**A-3:** The school should exclude the positive case and may begin gathering close contact information. Schools should utilize the COVID-19 Reporting Document (Excel document

provided by DOH/DOE) to record the information for the positive case and school-related close contacts and submit the reporting document to the DOH investigator when asked.

If the school determines who they feel are close contacts without confirmation by DOH and wishes to notify those students or staff, they may make that decision. The school may use the sample letter provided by DOE/DOH and include the school's exclusion policy for close contacts.

**Q-4: If a student has tested positive for COVID-19, completed isolation and recovered, can they still be a close contact and recommended to quarantine?**

**A-4:** An individual with a positive COVID-19 test, who has since recovered, need not quarantine if:

- the close contact exposure is within 90 days from the positive test; and
- the individual does not develop symptoms.

Those within the 90-day window who have another close contact exposure, and develop symptoms, should consult with their health care provider.

Anyone outside of that 90-day window with a close contact exposure is recommended to quarantine.

**Q-5: Who is my county health officer, with whom [SDCL 13-28-7.3](#) says I should work to exclude students?**

**A-5:** Statute 13-28-7.3 speaks to the exclusion of students from attendance who are determined to be a "risk or nuisance to the health of other students or school employees due to the presence of infectious disease . . ." The statute indicates that a school board or school superintendent may take this action "with the concurrence of the county health officer." This is an anachronistic statute that references former county structures, for the most part no longer utilized.

Since most counties do not have a designated county health officer, the Department of Education sees two options for schools. These should be considered in consultation with your school attorney. Also consider information on this topic provided by the Associated School Boards of South Dakota and the Council of School Attorneys Board of Directors.

1. Work with your county auditor to request that an individual be designated to serve as the county health officer. With the exception of Yankton and Aurora

counties, there are no county health officers presently. County health nurses are not county health officers; your regional DOH nurse is also not a county health officer.

2. Default to the processes and guidance related to close contacts from the DOH – recognizing that school boards have the ability to make decisions regarding exclusion of students who have been in close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19.

We believe the intent of the statute is that schools are making close contact determinations in conjunction with health experts. If your district is working with the DOH on the close contact process, we believe you can reasonably rely on that partnership in order to exercise your authority to exclude close contacts.

**Q-6: May a school district allow students identified as close contacts to attend school physically (in a school building versus distance learning)?**

**A-6:** The DOH and CDC recommend that close contacts of individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 quarantine for 14 days. School boards have the ability to define the conditions under which close contacts may resume school attendance. Some school boards have implemented policies that seek to balance public health concerns with the academic, social-emotional, and mental health needs of students. These policies may draw from the guidance available regarding critical infrastructure (or essential) workers and provide an approach that combines mitigation strategies and common sense. These policies are for *asymptomatic* close contacts only.

Infection Control

**Q-1: Many people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic. Should we still screen students for temperature and symptoms?**

**A-1:** DOH and DOE are encouraging schools to use a variety of mitigation strategies in their planning for SY 2020-21. On July 23, CDC released [guidance specific to screening](#). This guidance does not recommend universal screening of students be conducted by schools. The guidance does say that parents/caregivers should conduct daily monitoring of their children for signs of infectious illness, and students who are sick should not attend school in-person.

**Q-2: Are the DOH and DOE requiring students to wear masks?**

**A-2:** The DOH and DOE encourage school leaders to use a variety of mitigation strategies in their planning for SY 2020-21. In selecting which to use, school leaders need to balance public health considerations and current conditions of the virus in their communities with the overall health of students and staff.

On July 23, the CDC released [Guidance for K-12 School Administrators on the Use of Face Coverings in School](#). It offers general guidelines and recommendations on this topic. In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that school leaders and health advisors “consider whether the use of cloth face coverings is developmentally appropriate and feasible and whether the policy can be instituted safely.”

**Q-3: Are the DOH and DOE requiring staff to wear masks?**

**A-3:** See the answer above. Additionally, current science suggests that adults are more susceptible to complications from COVID-19 than students. School leaders will need to balance public health considerations and current conditions of the virus in their communities with the overall health of students and staff. A staff members’ duties would influence the type of infection control equipment that is appropriate for that situation.

**Q-4: Can schools require students and staff to wear masks if they wish?**

**A-4:** Yes. This would be a local policy decision. See questions above and [CDC guidance regarding face coverings in school](#).

**Q-5: Should teachers use clear face shields in place of cloth masks, so students can pick up on facial cues and mouth formations?**

**A-5:** From a public health perspective, clear face shields are a tool for protection against COVID-19, specifically around the eyes, but they do not replace face coverings due to large gaps on the side and bottom. From an educational perspective, clear face shields may be appropriate when it is important that students can see a teacher’s facial expressions and mouth movements; for example, in the case of teaching English language learners and students who are deaf or hearing impaired.

**Q-6: How do we handle students who are wearing the same masks over and over without washing? Do the masks become less effective in that case?**

**A-6:** Cloth masks should be washed regularly. The CDC offers information on [How to Wash Cloth Face Coverings](#).

**Q-7: Will the DOH and DOE help schools in supplying infection control materials, or should we seek out other supply chains on our own?**

**A-7:** Generally, schools will need to purchase their own infection control supplies. There may be times when schools can access certain items from the State's supply of personal protective equipment, which is normally reserved for healthcare workers. These opportunities will be communicated by DOH to school leaders via DOE.

## Sentinel Testing

**Q-1: I've heard that the State is offering sentinel testing for schools. How can I learn more?**

**A-1:** South Dakota is offering a voluntary [sentinel testing](#) program for schools. Sentinel testing involves testing a few asymptomatic individuals over time (i.e. each week or month) to monitor SARS-CoV-2 in a population. DOH will provide the following support to schools that decide to participate: 1) CDC-based guidance about K-12 sentinel surveillance 2) Personal protective equipment and guidance on how to use it 3) Specimen collection supplies and guidance on how to use them 4) Laboratory testing support at the state public health laboratory 5) Follow-up services such as case investigation and contact tracing. For more information, including how to participate, review this [PowerPoint presentation](#).

## Communication with Parents and Students

**Q-1: Will the state help school leaders communicate with their school community if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19?**

**A-1:** The DOH communicates directly with individuals who test positive for COVID-19, as well as their close contacts. The DOH can also assist a school in determining best methods for communicating with the larger school community about a positive case(s).

Communication should be designed to address the school community's desire for information, while also protecting student/staff privacy.

**Q-2: How do we communicate with our school community while still following HIPAA and FERPA?**

**A-2:** Communication to the broader school community will need to be general and protect student/staff privacy. DOH will handle communication with any individuals who test positive, as well as their close contacts, directly. DOH may enlist the help of school leaders in identifying close contacts. When DOH shares this type of information, school personnel would be bound by FERPA requirements to keep this information confidential.

**Q-3: How do we best calm anxiety about returning to school?**

**A-3:** Communication is critical. Be transparent in your communications at the local level with your school board, families, and the larger community. This is crucial to managing expectations. Let parents, staff, and students know that guidance, practices, and policy will change as our understanding of the virus improves. Remember that this is a stressful time for everyone. Encourage kindness and empathy.

Attendance, Assessment and Accountability

**Q-1: Will DOE be revisiting attendance standards due to the possibility of students needing to stay home for extended periods of time (because of being identified as a close contact or testing positive for COVID-19)?**

**A-1:** Attendance policy is a local decision. This applies whether a student is involved in face-to-face learning, remote learning, or some combination thereof. DOE recommends that schools communicate with parents – clearly and early on – about how attendance will be determined in the case of remote learning. Schools should continue to record daily attendance, with the expectation that instruction is occurring, and students are engaged (no matter their physical location). If a student is unable to continue learning due to illness, schools would treat the situation as they would any other illness and in accordance with local attendance policy. Concerning the 90% target attendance rate used for school accountability purposes (ARSD 24:55), that rule remains in place.

**Q-2: Will the state assessment be administered in SY 2020-21?**

**A-2:** At this time, South Dakota plans to administer required state assessments in the normal timeframe.

**Q-3: Due to COVID, my district is offering multiple learning opportunities this year. How do I manage all of this in the school calendar in Infinite Campus?**

**Q-3:** Calendar options for students attending virtually in school year 2020-21 are now available. A district utilizing distance learning options 1, 3, or 4 in the department's [Distance Learning Guidance](#) can create an additional calendar(s) within an already existing school to house their students who have chosen to attend virtually this year due to COVID-19. For consistency, DOE is asking districts to name these new calendars as follows: Calendar Name = Name of School C-19 Virtual (Example: Carthage Elem C-19 Virtual)

Districts are not allowed to house all students (K-12) who are attending virtually in one calendar. Districts must utilize their existing school structure and create separate virtual calendars for each attendance center. (Example: Elementary, Middle School, High School).

**Instructional Hours**

**Q-1: Will schools need to meet statutory requirements related to instructional hours for SY 2020-21?**

**A-1:** The expectation is that schools will be able to meet the minimum hour requirements of SDCL 13-26-1, whether through face-to-face learning, remote learning, or some combination thereof. When calculating instructional hours, these remote learning days count the same as a day of instruction and should be recorded as such in the student information system. DOE also understands that conditions surrounding the virus and its spread may change. SB 188 passed during the 2020 legislative session provides some flexibility for the Secretary of Education to waive this requirement, as long as the Governor's declared state of emergency is in place.

**Activities**

**Q-1: Can schools hold sports, music, drama and other activities? If so, how?**

**A-1:** The South Dakota High School Activities Association has released [guidance](#) for fall activities. Additional information can be found on SDHSAA's [COVID-19 information page](#).

**Q-2: What advice would be given regarding the sale and consumption of food and drinks sold at school-related events?**

**A-2:** DOH has shared guidance on this topic. See [doe.sd.gov/startingwell](http://doe.sd.gov/startingwell) and look in the Toolkit for Schools under Topical Guidance.

## Miscellaneous

**Q-1: Are students who are participating in distance learning still required to be vaccinated?**

**A-1:** Yes, state law requires any child, prior to admission, to provide certification that the child has received, or is in the process of receiving, adequate immunization against certain infectious diseases. See [SDCL 13-28-7.1](#).