

## Background

This document aims to inform California's K-12 schools of COVID-19 testing strategies for the 2022-2023 school year. It is intended to support planning processes for safe in-person learning, as disease management is an essential priority to maintain student well-being and development.

## Testing Framework:

Testing for COVID-19 remains an essential tool to decrease transmission, keep students and staff safe, and keep schools open for in-person instruction while mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please refer to the [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools to Support Safe In-Person Learning, 2022-2023 School Year](#) for more specific information on when and who to test in a school setting. This information is being incorporated into this framework by reference.

### Getting Tested for COVID-19:

Testing remains a key mitigation layer to detect and curb transmission of COVID-19. Schools are encouraged to ensure access to COVID-19 testing for students and staff, particularly for vulnerable communities. Schools should review support and resources offered by the [California COVID-19 Testing Task Force](#), as well as those available through healthcare insurers, local, and federal sources.

#### 1. Recommended Actions:

- a. CDPH recommends that antigen tests be considered the primary option for detecting COVID-19 in schools, compared to PCR tests. For more information, see the [Testing Framework for K-12 Schools](#).
- b. Due to the increased travel and social interactions that often occurs during school-breaks, it is recommended that students and staff get tested for COVID-19 prior to returning to school following major breaks (e.g., summer, winter, spring).
- c. Additional testing recommendations are referenced in relevant sections below.

### Managing Individuals with Symptoms:

#### Recommended Actions:

a. K-12 schools are encouraged to develop standard criteria for managing students who develop symptoms of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. In most situations, any student who develops new, unexplained symptoms should not return to campus until it is clear that symptoms are mild and improving or are due to a non-infectious cause (e.g., allergies). This includes waiting until 24 hours have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.

b. Additionally, if [symptoms](#) are concerning for COVID-19, it is strongly recommended that students wear a mask and get tested immediately. Students should also follow [CDPH recommendations](#) for retesting and/or isolating if results are positive.

### **Managing Students Diagnosed with COVID-19:**

Prompt management of students with COVID-19 can prevent further spread and, in some cases, allow for early treatment.

#### **1. Recommended Action:**

a. Students diagnosed with COVID-19 should follow recommendations listed in [Table 1 \(Persons with COVID-19\)](#) of CDPH's guidance for the general public, including staying home for at least 5 days and wearing a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days, especially in indoor settings.

### **Managing Students Exposed to COVID-19:**

Prompt notification to students and families regarding exposure to infectious diseases, including COVID-19, can allow for rapid testing, early treatment, and prevention of further spread.

#### **1. Recommended Actions:**

a. It is recommended that families notify schools if their child has COVID-19 and was on school grounds during their [infectious period](#), and that schools in turn notify students who spent more than a cumulative total of 15 minutes (within a 24-hour time period) in a shared indoor airspace (e.g., classroom) with someone with COVID-19 during their infectious period.

b. In lieu of individual exposure notifications, schools should consider providing a general notification to the entire school community during times of elevated [community transmission](#) of COVID-19. This communication can alert all to the increased potential of being exposed to COVID-19 due to a rise in cases

among school and community members, and remind all to monitor for symptoms and get tested.

c. All students with known exposure to persons with COVID-19 should follow recommendations listed in [Table 2 \(Asymptomatic Persons Who are Exposed to Someone with COVID-19\)](#) of CDPH's guidance for the general public. If they remain without symptoms, students may continue to take part in all aspects of K–12 schooling including sports and extracurricular activities. As recommended in [Table 2](#), they should wear a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days and get tested 3–5 days after last exposure.

### The following are recommended practices for California districts, schools, and county offices of education:

- **Identify** a COVID Testing Point of Contact to facilitate communication and coordination with the CA Testing Task Force along with other relevant agencies or organizations that oversee school operations.
- **Review** and reference current testing recommendations provided in the [CDPH K-12 School COVID Guidance](#) and any additional recommendations or requirements provided by the Local Health Jurisdiction.
- **Maintain** situational awareness of the [testing resources and programs offered by the CA Testing Task Force](#) and monitor availability of pre-positioned testing resources housed with a County Office of Education or Local Health Jurisdiction for rapid distribution to schools.
- **Monitor** the [CDC's COVID Community Data Tracker](#) as a method of identifying when to increase or reestablish school testing operations.
- **Communicate** any questions, concerns, or additional operational testing resources/needs to the CA Testing Task Force at [schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov)

### The following list describes operational considerations for COVID-19 testing for K-12 schools:

- California is currently offering [direct ordering](#) of COVID-19 over-the-counter (OTC) tests to schools. Schools may use OTC tests to supplant on-site testing in many situations. Such efforts should be paired with [educational materials](#) to facilitate proper OTC use, particularly in communities with limited English proficiency and/or lower health literacy.

- California also offers COVID-19 OTC tests to all county offices of education (COEs) for use by public and private school students and staff for return from various prolonged school holiday break testing, such as summer and winter breaks. California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has communicated with COEs about a 2022-2023 Winter Break distribution; for more information, please contact your local [COE](#) or email [schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov).
- CDPH recommends that antigen tests be considered the primary option for detecting COVID-19 in schools, rather than PCR tests. Both the professional, on-site antigen tests as well as the OTC at-home antigen tests have been effective in identifying persons who have infectious levels of all known variants of SARS-CoV-2. PCR tests are highly sensitive, but their utility is greatest as a confirmatory test in appropriate situations and/or in clinical settings. If you are currently participating in a CDPH school-based PCR testing program, please email [schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov) for more information about transitioning to an antigen testing program, and to learn more about available resources.
- CDPH will continue to support professional on-site antigen testing programs in the 2022-2023 school year. However, the volume of anticipated on-site testing is likely to decrease with the increased availability and ease of OTC tests. We anticipate the workload for on-site testing to substantially decrease for the 2022-2023 school year as OTC testing will often meet testing needs. Thus, state support for school-based testing staff (via End-to-End vendors) will be reduced. For more information, please email [schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov).

**CDPH recommends that antigen tests be considered the primary option for detecting COVID-19 in schools, compared to PCR tests.**

**If used, PCR or other molecular testing may be considered in limited situations in the school setting:**

- People with symptoms who may have a negative initial antigen test AND are at high risk for hospitalization or death from COVID-19 benefit from [early treatment](#). They may consider PCR (or other molecular) test and/or repeat an antigen test (at-home tests are acceptable) in 24 hours if the PCR result has not returned ([Updated Testing Guidance](#)). Individuals may consider repeat antigen testing every 24-48 hours until a positive test is returned or until symptoms improve.

- When a participant has ambiguous or invalid antigen test results, even on a repeat test, schools can consider repeating an antigen test in 24-48 hours, or PCR testing as an alternative.

These updates and anticipated changes are based on current scientific knowledge and anticipated trends. The framework is subject to change. As noted in the [SMARTER plan](#), COVID-19 trends can shift rapidly and California's response to conditions in schools must remain nimble, adaptive, and responsive to dynamic challenges to keep students and staff safe.

Preliminary Testing Framework for K-12 Schools for the 2022–2023 School Year originally published on May 27, 2022.