

COVID-19 and Schools FAQ

Updates are in Italics>

1. If a student/teacher/staff thinks they have contracted COVID-19 what do they do and how do they notify the school?

First, they should be referred for COVID testing. They should contact the school liaison or school nurse. The school liaison or school nurse would then notify VCPH.

2. How is the class notified if a student/teacher gets COVID-19 and what do they do?

While following HIPAA and FERPA guidelines, the school administration or appointed representative notifies the class with a general message that there is a positive person in class (who has been sent home). Then, contact tracing begins immediately. If VCPH receives notification of a school staff member or student being COVID positive, we will contact the school COVID liaison to let them know so local, school-based contact tracing can be conducted.

3. Is it mandated that a COVID case or contact stays home for a certain amount of days?

If a student or staff member is COVID positive, they must isolate at home for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or date of positive test, whichever is earlier. If a student or staff member is a close contact to a COVID positive person, they must quarantine for 14 days from the last day they had contact with that person, regardless of their test results. These instructions are per CDPH. A close contact is defined as having spent 15 or more minutes within 6 feet of a COVID-infected individual. These 15 minutes may include an accumulation of several different contacts during the day. The [CDPH FAQs](#) state that CDPH is following the [CDC guidance](#) on close contact.

4. If a class must close due to COVID-19, do the classes around that classroom have to close?

This is unlikely if the class has practiced cohorting. Surrounding classes would be considered for closure if there was close cross-cohorting between those classes and the class with one or more COVID cases. VCPH would determine what other classes may have to close depending on the level of exposure.

5. What are the steps before individuals can come back to school?

VCPH communicates with those in isolation (COVID positive) and those in quarantine (COVID exposed) and will provide direction to them on when they can return to school/work. If someone has a non-COVID respiratory or other infectious diagnosis, then the student/staff would follow the direction of their primary medical provider and provide a note releasing them back to school/work. The provider may or may not have them test for COVID based on the individual's symptoms. Testing is widely available throughout the County, does not require a doctor's recommendation and should be encouraged if the individual has any concern they might have COVID.

6. Do they have to have temperature checks when the students come in the gate?

We encourage the flexible approach of passive and/or active screening of students and staff depending on the resources of the school. We recognize that active screening of everyone may not be possible and encourage the school to develop a plan for documenting passive screening (e.g. using an app). Temperature screening may be performed at home and transmitted to the school. Anyone with a temperature of 99.5 F or greater by a no-touch temperature scanner should have their temperature confirmed by an oral thermometer and if still 99.5 F or greater should be isolated and kept or sent home. Screeners do not need to wear an N95 mask, a properly worn face covering is sufficient.

7. What is the mandate or is there a mandate for teachers and staff getting tested?

As explained in the Framework for K-12 Schools in California, school staff should be tested, including teachers, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, janitors, bus drivers, or any other school employee that may have contact with students or other staff. School districts and schools should ensure that staff are tested periodically (every 2 months) by their primary care provider or by referring teachers to a community testing site. This would need to be tracked and handled by the school (i.e. Human Resources). VCPH would follow-up with any staff that test positive for COVID. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Schools-FAQ.aspx>

8. Can schools require staff members to be tested for COVID-19?

Please consult with your risk management department and school board.

9. Can schools require staff members to provide proof of their COVID-19 test results?

Please consult with your risk management department and school board.

10. Have any ideas arisen as to how schools can be assured that staff is complying with periodic testing and how to keep track of the expected periodic testing results given that the testing is likely going to be done at off campus sites and that negative test results are not required to be submitted to employers?

Many schools are having staff and teachers report to HR that they were tested per the routine testing guidelines and are confidentially tracking this. This would be similar to staff and teachers being required to be screened for tuberculosis or receive immunizations and reporting to HR.

11. Do schools need to increase periodic testing (1/4 faculty every 2 weeks) if as a county we were to revert from the red back to the purple tier?

In general, CDPH supports but does not require increased testing in counties that move back to a more restrictive tier. VCPH may also recommend more frequent testing in a school or district depending on local conditions. Feedback from Health Department epidemiologists documenting local conditions (e.g., case rate by zip code, etc.) should influence this decision.

12. At what point would they have to completely close a school?

Individual school closure is recommended based on the number of cases, the percentage of the teacher/students/staff that are positive for COVID-19, and following consultation with the Health Officer. Individual school closure may be appropriate when there are multiple cases in multiple cohorts at a school or when at least 5% of the total number of teachers/student/staff are cases within a 14-day period, depending on the size and physical layout of the school. The Local Health Officer may also determine school closure is warranted for other reasons, including results from a public health investigation or other local epidemiological data.

13. If a school is closed for in-person learning, when may it reopen?

Schools may typically reopen after 14 days and the following have occurred:

- Cleaning and disinfection
- Public health investigation
- Consultation with the local public health department

14. What are the criteria for closing a school district?

A superintendent should close a school district if 25% or more of schools in a district have closed due to COVID-19 within 14 days, and in consultation with VCPH. Districts may typically reopen after 14 days.

15. A school starts with reopening grades K-3rd two weeks after entering the red tier with the intention of opening grades 4th-6th several weeks later, after seeing how the K-3rd works. However, a few weeks later they are back in the purple tier. Can they still proceed with their plans to open their grades 4th-6th?

Yes, they can proceed with opening the rest of the grades. While we are in the red tier, K-12 schools could open and stay open, even if we go back to a more restrictive tier; the school in question here chose a phased reopening process. Careful thought and collaboration with VCPH should be given to continuing school opening in light of the increased transmission in the community. A factor to take into consideration is the optics of opening additional grades when businesses are having to scale back.

Schools must have actually reopened at least some classes for in-person instruction while the county was in the red tier in order to remain open if the county moves back to the purple tier. If the county is in the purple tier on the day the school plans to reopen for in-person instruction, the school must wait until it is eligible again (i.e. county in the red tier for 14+ days).

16. If the county goes back to the purple tier, can schools still apply for a waiver to reopen for in-person instruction?

Yes, TK-6th schools are eligible for an elementary school waiver and must follow the [CDPH Elementary School Waiver Process](#). The waiver application can be found [here](#).

17. Is VCPH continuing to consider TK-6th waiver requests while we are back in the purple tier and the case rates continue to increase?

Yes, VCPH is accepting waiver requests and consulting with CDPH on the approval.

18. What documentation is currently needed to accompany the waiver request, as described in the consultation section of the waiver template?

- **Waiver Application Reads:** *A representative parents' association that your school serves as evidence of parental support. If your typical enrollment is too small to have a parents' association, a signed separate attestation by you that parents have been consulted and concur with in-person instruction is sufficient.*
 - **VCPH will accept ANY of the following for this requirement:**
 - *Letter of Support from the Parent Teacher Association.*
 - *Signed attestation from the Superintendent indicating that they have consulted with parents, and there is some support to return to in-person instruction.*
 - *Survey of parents indicating that there is some support to return to in-person instruction.*
 - *Master schedule for re-opening that includes the number of classes by school site that will be returning for in-person instruction.*
- **Waiver Application Reads:** *Your school's governing board, or district board as appropriate, as evidence of community support indicating that they concur with in-person instruction. Your school's union as evidence of labor support, or, if your institution does not have unionized staff, a signed separate attestation from you that teachers and staff have been consulted as part of this process, indicating they concur with in-person instruction.*
 - **VCPH will accept ANY of the following for this requirement:**
 - *Confirmation of action taken by the school's governing board that they are supportive of the waiver application.*
 - *Letter of support from the school's union.*
 - *Signed attestation from the Superintendent indicating that they have consulted with teachers, and there is some support to return to in-person instruction.*
 - *Survey of teachers indicating that there is some support to return to in-person instruction.*
 - *Master schedule for re-opening that includes the number of classes by school site that will be returning for in-person instruction.*

19. Can grades 7th-12th open following the cohort guidance?

Schools currently providing in-person instruction under the [Cohort Guidance](#) may continue to do so. However, schools that were operating only in the manner permitted under the Cohort Guidance are not considered “open” and may not open the rest of their grades or classes.

20. If 14 students and 2 teachers are in the same classroom all day, 2 days a week, even though they are social distancing and wearing their masks, would not everyone in that classroom be considered a close contact? This question assumes that the classroom space is filled (that the classroom square footage allows 14/2 individuals with social distancing, but no more). Would it be appropriate to only call the students sitting around the COVID case the close contacts?

It may be justified to only call the students sitting around the COVID case the close contacts. This is a more likely scenario if the children are older. Presumably, children in the earlier grades may be more difficult to keep from close social interaction. VCPH would work with the school liaisons to determine close contacts and need for quarantine on a case by case basis. If only those students sitting nearest the case are quarantined, it is likely that the other students and teachers in the classroom would be serially tested over the ensuing weeks to determine if there are other cases in the class.

21. In the red tier, will districts be allowed to space students less than 6 feet apart in classrooms if needed to accommodate scheduling demands? If not, in what tier would that be allowed?

No, social distancing (6 feet) must still be maintained in the red tier. It is not anticipated that there will be any relaxation of the 6-foot social distancing in any of the tiers.

22. If students are permitted to be spaced less than 6 feet apart in classrooms, what are the guidelines about how close together they can be?

Currently, students will still need to maintain social distancing (6 feet) in classrooms. There is no change in those guidelines.

23. In what tier – if any - does the requirement to provide distance learning end?

At this time, CDE states that distance learning must be made available if an LEA is unable to offer in-person instruction in part or fully as a result of a state or public health order.

24. Clarification is needed on what is allowed regarding choir and music classes. Can students sing and play indoors with social distancing and using devices on the instrument that reduce the spread of saliva? If not indoors, what about outdoors?

Per [CDPH FAQs](#), outdoor singing and band practice are permitted, provided that precautions such as physical distancing and face coverings are implemented. Playing of wind instruments

(any instrument played by the mouth, such as a trumpet or clarinet) is strongly discouraged. School officials, staff, parents and students should be aware of the increased likelihood for transmission from exhaled droplets during singing and band practice and physical distancing beyond 6 feet is strongly recommended for any of these activities.

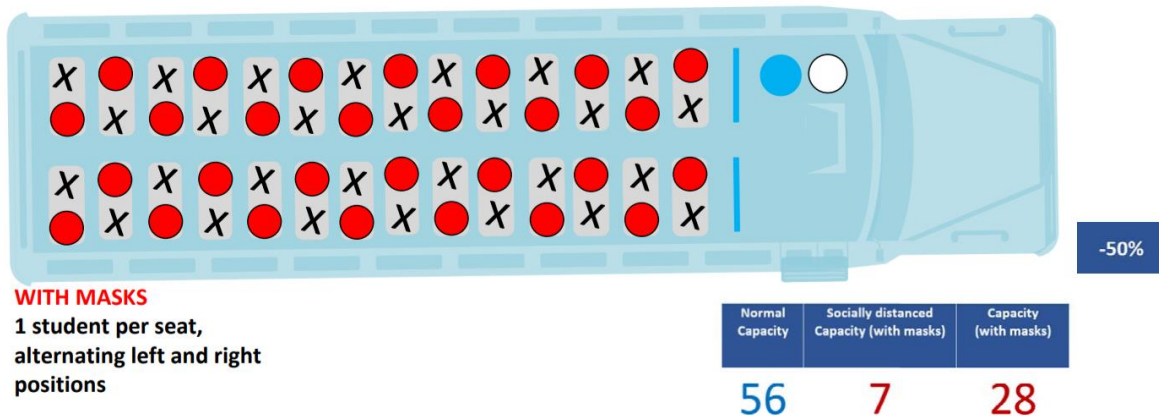
25. What waivers and/or licensing is required to provide childcare during the day? Is there a difference whether or not it is district-provided or from a third party (Boys and Girls Club, for example)?

California Care Licensing does require a special waiver for providing childcare, outside the regular childcare license, whether it is the school district or a third party. Please contact them for more information.

26. What are the social distancing requirements for school buses? How many students can be on a bus?

Drivers can create distance between students on the bus, including seating children one student per *bench* facing forward and skipping rows between students, *if possible*. Students who live in the same household may sit together. Schools may consider alternative strategies to accommodate the reduced number of students in buses, such as staggered pick up and drop off times or additional bus routes. The [CDPH FAQs](#) state that face coverings are required on buses. The guidance acknowledges that a full 6 feet of physical distancing may not be practicable on buses, therefore face coverings are essential. Physical distancing should be maximized to the extent practicable. *This guidance is applicable to all transportation needs for students.*

How Many Students Can Ride the Bus?



27. Will bus drivers receive an extension on getting their medical examiner's certificate (required for bus driving license) if they are unable to schedule the needed physician exam because they have tested positive for COVID-19?

Please visit this link for more information: <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/emergency/notice-enforcement-policy-regarding-expiring-drivers-licenses-and-medical-examiners>

28. What is the definition of "well ventilated" rooms? Door open? Window? HVAC air exchanges?

Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, by opening windows and doors and using fans. Ensure that ventilation (HVAC) systems operate properly. In general, increasing ventilation and filtration is usually appropriate, however, due to the complexity and diversity of building types, sizes, etc. a professional should interpret the guidelines from ASHRAE for their specific building and circumstances. HEPA filters and humidifiers are also helpful.

29. What safety measures are required if COVID-19 is considered aerosolized and spread through respiratory aerosols?

Per the CDC, the epidemiology of COVID-19 indicates that most infections are spread through close contact, not airborne transmission. All safety measures are in place to limit close contact.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-sars-cov-2.html>

30. The direction from VCPH and the schools JPA conflicts about what quarantine is required for individuals who test negative after having been in close contact with an infected person. Please provide clarification.

VCPH follows CDC and CDPH guidance regarding quarantine. For individuals who are determined to be a close contact to a COVID positive case, they must quarantine for 14 days from the day of last contact, regardless of a negative test result. This is due to the long incubation period of COVID-19.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>

31. What is VCPH's position on when sports competitions can resume? The California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) – our school sports governing body – has indicated that multi-sport competitions will begin after the first of the year. It is our understanding that athletics are currently limited to conditioning and practice drills with appropriate social distancing. What is the position of VCPH with regard to reengagement of in-person sports competitions after January 1, 2021?

We have received no further direction from the State on when team sports competitions can resume. This is not the decision of CIF. It is their opinion only. The State is actively working on firming up their guidelines. VCPH will review them when published.

32. What is the guidance regarding youth sports competing?

Only conditioning and skill-building is allowed at this time. No competition is allowed. CIF cannot dictate when sports can resume.

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Youth-Sports-FAQ.aspx>

33. Can schools require students in 2nd grade and lower to wear a mask?

Yes, while VCPH and CDPH “strongly encourages” students 2nd grade and younger to wear a mask, a school can require it.

34. Is it safe for teachers to remove their mask once students have left for the day?

Yes, if the teacher is in the room alone, they may remove their mask.

35. Can schools exclude students from class who refuse to wear masks?

Yes, a school can exclude students and provide distance learning instead.

36. Can I use face shields instead of masks?

Face shields are not a substitute for masks. They may be worn in addition to masks. Please refer to the [Mask Exemption for Students](#) for additional information.

37. When having to isolate “potential” COVID students, can the isolation area be set up outdoors? If the isolation area is indoors, is it safe for school staff to also be in the room?

If a school can set up an isolation area outdoors, that is ideal. If not, VCPH encourages schools to have a separate health office or space for sick students to be evaluated. Contact with the student should be minimized and limited to one staff person, and face coverings should be worn by both the student and staff. Health technicians and school nurses should wear a procedure (surgical) mask, a face shield/goggles and gloves when working with symptomatic students. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/pdfs/UnderstandDifferenceInfographic-508.pdf>

38. How will fire drills, evacuation and lockdown drills work with social distancing?

Fire drills can be conducted by individual classroom in order to adhere to social distancing requirements and still learn the evacuation route. Lockdown drills can have students down on the floor next to their desk, instead of congregating in a corner of the room. Education about what would happen if the event was real should still occur. In the event of an actual emergency, social distancing will not be the priority; the safety of students and staff will be.

39. Many special needs students, students that need assistance with toileting or wheelchair-bound students require hands-on assistance. How can a staff member safely assist these students without creating mutual risk?

Staff will need to wear a face covering, face shield/goggles and gloves when assisting students with toileting or any other hands-on activities.