

Talking Points for Schools: COVID-19

- COVID-19 in Children
 - Multiple studies have been conducted throughout the pandemic to compare rates of infections in children to those of adults. Initially, it appeared as if children had a lower rate of infections, however this was during the time when exposures were low (due to school, daycares, and other activities being closed) and children had a lower probability of being tested. More recent studies have found that children have rates of infection comparable, and in some settings higher, than in adults. For example, children 5-17 had higher rates than in adults 50 and older.
 - Children can transmit the COVID-19 virus to others. There have been outbreaks among camps, sporting events, and schools that demonstrate that children can and do transmit the virus to others, which is why mitigation measures are essential in schools.
 - Although many children tend to have mild infections, it is essential to protect them as some infections in children do result in serious illness or death. It is also important to offer protection to children as it remains unknown what long-term consequences may be associated with COVID-19.
 - Keep in mind that COVID-19 is an evolving situation and as new evidence becomes available, guidelines may adapt.
- Schools and COVID-19 Transmission
 - Outbreaks in schools have occurred and have led to closures of the facilities, however this has happened mainly in school settings where prevention strategies are not implemented or are not followed. Mitigation measures help keep children safe and allow in-person learning to continue.
 - When prevention strategies are in place and utilized, transmission within school settings is typically lower than or similar to the community levels of transmission.
- Prevention Strategies and In-Person Learning
 - Use of multiple prevention strategies provides greater protection in breaking transmission chains than a single strategy alone. This referred to as layering mitigation strategies.
 - Prevention strategies to promote in schools include vaccination, consistent and correct use of masks, physical distancing, screening tests in schools, staying home when sick, and improved ventilation. These measures have shown in multiple studies to be effective. Below are some of the highlights of these studies:
 - A study of 11 school districts in North Carolina had minimal school-related transmission even though the community transmission was high. These schools implemented and strictly adhered to multiple prevention strategies, including universal mask use and physical distancing.
 - One study looking at K-12 schools in St. Louis found that, with multiple prevention strategies in place, only 2% of close contacts of COVID-19 cases in schools tested positive, even though the community transmission was high at the time.

- Masks
 - CDC and CDH recommend universal masking in schools, because not all students are eligible for the vaccine, yet and cases of COVID-19 are increasing again. Masks are a crucial way to protect those who are vulnerable from the virus.
- Physical Distancing
 - The most recent recommendation of physical distancing in classroom settings is 3-6 feet of distance. Multiple studies have shown, that **with other mitigation strategies in place**, transmission is still low if students are closer than 6 feet. Masking is essential to limiting transmission when having students less than 6 feet apart in a classroom.
 - When masks cannot be worn (such as when eating) physical distancing between those who are not fully vaccinated should be prioritized to reduce transmission risk.
- Screening Testing in K-12 Schools
 - CDC currently recommends screening unvaccinated students once per week in areas with moderate (yellow), substantial (orange), and high (red) transmission. Many students may have mild or asymptomatic infections, which makes screening an important tool to prevent spread of the COVID-19 virus.
 - Screening tests are especially useful when masks and physical distancing are utilized less frequently.
 - CDH will work with any school individually to help provide free screening tests to children and staff to reduce the financial burden associated with screening tests.
- Sports and Other Extracurricular Activities
 - These activities are important for children, but can increase risk of transmission within the school community. The priority is to have children able to have in-person learning, so sometimes extracurricular activities may need to be paused or operate differently to reduce risk and keep in-person learning intact.
- Quarantine in Schools
 - Quarantine is when someone has been exposed to a person with COVID-19 and does not currently have symptoms. Since they have been exposed, there is a chance they have caught the virus and may develop symptoms and/or transmit COVID-19 to others. It is best to quarantine to reduce further transmission of the virus as someone who has been exposed may spread the virus without realizing they are even infected yet.
 - Unvaccinated individuals:
 - There are three quarantine options available to unvaccinated individuals who were exposed to someone with a COVID-19 infection:
 - 14 day option: Quarantine at home for 14 days from the date of exposure (exposure day is day 0). This is the gold standard for quarantines.
 - 10 day option: Quarantine at home for 10 days from the date of exposure (exposure day is day 0). Quarantine can be discontinued after 10 days if no symptoms have developed. The contact should continue to

mask in public and monitor for symptoms for the full 14 days after exposure.

- 7 day option: Quarantine at home for 7 days from the date of exposure, but the individual must receive a negative PCR test on day 5 or later (exposure day is day 0). If the PCR test is negative on day 5 or later the quarantine can be discontinued after 7 days if no symptoms have developed. The contact should continue to mask in public and monitor for symptoms for the full 14 days after exposure.
- **Unvaccinated students** identified as contacts do NOT need to quarantine from school or extracurricular activities* if both the case and contact were wearing their masks properly AND other mitigation measures were in place.

**These students do not need to quarantine from school or extracurricular activities, but do need to quarantine from the community.*

- Vaccinated individuals:
 - Vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine, however they should get tested 3-5 days after an exposure, even if they don't have symptoms, and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their negative test result.
- Unvaccinated but had COVID-19 in the past 90 days:
 - These contacts do not need to quarantine as long as they have had COVID-19 in the past 90 days, has recovered from their illness, and remain symptom free. If symptoms develop they should follow up with their healthcare provider.