



RETURN TO LEARN

Ipswich Public Schools

2021-2022

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Executive Summary

On July 30, 2021, the Commissioner of Education and DESE issued new guidance regarding the opening of schools in the fall. The guidance indicated that all previously released health and safety guidance was lifted and that all schools are required to be in session full time, five days a week for the 2021-2022 school year.

This document contains information on the health and safety requirements that we will continue to keep in place along with information on our facilities and cleaning, food service, and transportation. The document concludes with a number of protocols for dealing with suspected cases of COVID-19.

Please take some time to familiarize yourself with this document and the particular information regarding your particular school and circumstances. As you know, this situation continues to remain fluid and we will make adjustments as deemed necessary to maintain the health and safety of our staff, students, and families.

Letter from Superintendent

August 25, 2021

Dear Parents, Staff, and Ipswich Community:

On March 12, 2020, the education of our students in Ipswich was turned on its head. Schools were forced to close amid concerns about the spreading COVID-19 pandemic. The Ipswich Public Schools quickly transformed from a brick and mortar learning model to a fully remote model in a matter of days. Our staff and students are to be commended for their flexibility and commitment to learning. From March until June, our students, teachers, and families engaged, to the best of their ability, in this new learning environment. How we are responding to this pandemic will be the subject of discussion in the annals of history.

Last year, we were very successful in maintaining a hybrid model for educating our students with minimal disruption. The time and effort put into developing the plan last year paid off in that there was only one case of in-school transmission of COVID-19 and that was between two individuals who were unmasked. We were able to keep students and staff in school and safe. I am proud of the efforts of everyone involved from our families and students to our entire Ipswich Public Schools staff. Together, we fared better than most communities. At the end of June this year, the Commissioner lifted all restrictions and discontinued the previous guidance regarding COVID-19 and we all hoped to return to a “normal” school year.

As we prepare for the opening of the 2021-2022 school year, there is a renewed concern for the rise in COVID-19 cases and the Delta variant. In response, the Commissioner of Education is expected to make an announcement today mandating masks through at least October 1st for all students and staff in Pre-K through Grade 12. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be issuing updated guidance regarding protocols for testing students and staff, masking, and other topics related to the safety of our students. As a district, we will continue to follow many of the same guidelines in terms of cleaning/sanitizing the buildings, maintaining social distancing to the extent possible, and practicing hand hygiene as we did last school year. Any updated information will be shared with the school community as it becomes available to us. This document contains the most salient information that we have at this time.

I thank you for your continued support as we work together to ensure a safe and successful school year for the students of Ipswich.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brian J. Blake
Superintendent of Schools

COVID -19 Response Leaders

In accordance with the guidance provided by DESE regarding the reopening of our schools, the district has designated COVID-19 Response Leaders at the district and building levels who are responsible for developing and implementing plans for their buildings.

The COVID-19 Response Leader for the District is Dr. Brian J. Blake, Superintendent of Schools (bblake@ipsk12.net). The COVID-19 Response Leaders for the individual schools are:

- Paul F. Doyon Memorial School: Principal, Sarah Goodale-O'Brien (sobrien@ipsk12.net)
- Winthrop Elementary School: Principal, Amy Sullivan (asullivan@ipsk12.net)
- Ipswich Middle School: Principal, Kathleen McMahon (kmcmahon@ipsk12.net)
- Ipswich High School: Principal, Jonathan Mitchell (jmitchell@ipsk12.net)

Guiding Principles

In developing our Return to Learn plans last year, the Nimble Systems group and the School Reopening Oversight Committee established the following guiding principles. We continue to focus on these principles as we prepare for the 2021-2022 School Year.

- Health and safety of staff, students, and families
- Follow established guidelines (WHO; CDC; DESE)
- Establishing connections with students is critical for success
 - What works best for IPSWICH?

Academic Calendar

The Academic Calendar for the 2021-2022 school year has not changed. The first day for staff is August 30, 2021 while students return to school on Wednesday, September 1, 2021. The full Academic Calendar can be found [here](#). The Superintendent of Schools will notify parents and families of any changes to the school calendar.

Health and Safety Requirements

Masks and Face Coverings

Masks and face coverings are among the most critical components of risk reduction for transmitting COVID-19. Masks/face coverings protect the general public against COVID-19 infection. A growing body of evidence suggests that masks protect those who wear them and may drastically reduce severity of infection. Students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to wear masks/face coverings may have the option of wearing a face shield, if possible. Adults, including all educators and staff, are required to wear masks/face coverings that adequately cover their nose and mouth. This is in accordance with the most recent DESE guidance. The mandatory mask requirements will be reviewed on or by October 1, 2021.

Face coverings will be required to be worn by all students and staff in grades pre-K-12 unless they have provided a doctor's note documenting a medical or disability exemption. All staff regardless of their students' grade levels are required to wear masks. Face coverings can be disposable or reusable and will need to fully cover the nose and mouth and secure under the chin, be made with at least 2 layers of breathable material, fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face, and be secured with ties or earloops. If staff members or students do not have a face covering, they will be provided with a disposable one by the school district.

The only exceptions to mask/face covering requirements will be for those individuals who cannot wear a mask/face covering due to medical conditions, disability impact, or other health/safety factors. Mask breaks are scheduled several times a day. During mask breaks students will be socially distanced to the extent possible. Masks are not required for outdoor activities. Mask breaks will ideally occur during physical movement breaks outside (weather permitting) and always under the supervision of an adult. If it is not possible for students to be outside during a mask break, students will be in a room with windows and/or doors open for ventilation.

Families are expected to provide masks/face coverings for students. Extra disposable masks will be available in the event a student forgets their mask. Families should wash reusable masks daily or provide a fresh reusable mask each day. If a family is unable to afford masks, they should contact their building principal. Masks/face coverings must be worn by everyone on a school bus at all times.

Physical Distancing

The Ipswich Public Schools will continue to maintain social distancing to the extent possible while students are unmasked. There are no physical distancing requirements when students and staff are wearing masks.

We will consistently implement other mitigating measures in addition to physical distancing (hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting, masks/face coverings). It is important to remember that no single mitigation strategy is effective; rather it is the layering and concurrent implementation of multiple mitigation strategies that will slow transmission. Clearly, schools must constantly analyze health data and layer mitigation strategies in a way that slows transmission while simultaneously providing as much educational benefit as possible.

Screening for Symptoms

It is critical that families and caregivers check their child every morning for Symptoms of COVID-19. Checking children every morning at home will serve as the primary screening mechanism for COVID-19 symptoms.

Families should use a checklist (provided in this document) every day before sending their child to school. DESE does not require schools to institute screening procedures at the point of entry and does not recommend temperature checks. Faculty and staff working with students will report to the nurse if they suspect any student of exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or other illnesses. The district strongly encourages families to discuss testing with their health care provider if they have reason to believe their child has COVID-19 and keep the child at home until they are able to be tested.

Families play a critical role in supporting the new culture of health and safety that each school must establish. Most importantly, families can help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in their school communities by checking their children daily for any COVID-19 symptoms and keeping them home from school if they are sick or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19.

Hand Hygiene

Handwashing removes pathogens from the surface of the hands. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be utilized when hand washing is not available. Students and staff are expected to exercise hand hygiene upon arrival at school, before eating, following bathroom use, after removing a soiled mask and prior to donning a new mask, and before dismissal. When handwashing, individuals should use soap and water to wash all surfaces of their hands for at least 20 seconds, wait for visible lather, rinse thoroughly, and dry with an individual disposable towel.

Hand sanitizing is required if handwashing is not feasible. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol.

COVID-19 Testing in Schools

This year, the Ipswich Public Schools will be participating in the State's new "Test and Stay" program and testing for symptomatic individuals. Please see the protocols below for additional information.

Vaccines (In general and COVID-19)

Parents must ensure that vaccines are current before children return to school in-person. Health care providers strongly recommend all students and staff get their regular flu vaccine. Ensuring all students, teachers, and staff receive the seasonal flu vaccine is an extremely high priority.

While we cannot mandate that students be vaccinated against COVID, it is strongly encouraged for students 12 years of age and older. Please let your school nurse know if your child has been vaccinated.

Health and Safety/PPE Supplies

The district has ordered standard healthcare supplies in accordance with DESE guidance. Additional safety precautions are required for school nurses and any staff supporting high-intensity students in close proximity. These precautions include eye protection and a mask/face covering. Precautions may also include gloves and disposable gowns or a washable outer layer of clothing depending on the duration of contact and especially if the individual may come into close contact with bodily fluids.

Visitors in Buildings

Visitors should make an appointment with the front office for any drop off of materials or required meeting with faculty, staff, or administration. Upon arriving for their appointment, they should wash hands or sanitize them using provided materials at a table outside the office, and then check in at the walk-up window. All visitors must enter through the main entrance and wear a mask. A waiting room outside of the office will be provided for visitors. The main office will maintain a visitor log including the first and last name of the visitor, the date of the visit, the visitor's phone number, arrival and departure times, and all areas the visitor entered in the building. A waiting room outside of the office will be provided for visitors.

School Facilities Protocols

Cleaning and Sanitization

Our site custodial teams will clean our school facilities on a daily basis using industry standard COVID-19 cleaning products. On Saturdays, the custodial teams will engage in deep cleaning and disinfection. On a daily basis, the custodial teams will continue to perform standard cleaning practices to include the following:

- emptying trash and recycling
- wiping down tables and chairs
- sweeping and vacuuming of rugs and floors
- cleaning restrooms
- maintaining school grounds as needed.

In addition to performing these standard cleaning practices, the custodial teams will engage in COVID-19 related specialized cleaning routines to maximize and efficiently combat the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious germs. As part of this specialized cleaning, custodial staff will perform additional services to include the use of electro-static sprayers in each building coinciding with the use of specialized concentrated cleaning products, which are designed to mitigate germ transfer;

- use approved pre-mixed disinfectant cleaners to clean up common areas and common issues;
- wall mounted hand sanitizer units throughout classrooms, bathrooms, and entry/exit areas;
- paper towel dispensers in each bathroom and classroom with faucets;
- classroom faucets and counters;
- classroom windows and sills;
- water bottle filling stations;
- daily cleaning of high volume areas and high touch points multiple times per day;
- bathrooms, toilets and urinals;
- doors, door handles, push bars and plates;
- light switches;
- ADA support bars;
- stair wells and handrails;
- entrance and exit areas; and
- elevators.

HVAC and Air Quality

The three school buildings of the Ipswich Public Schools have various HVAC systems, differing depending on age and school construction/design, and we work to ensure that all of our HVAC systems have been properly and officially commissioned and are operating correctly. We recognize HVAC systems as an integral component in our safety planning to reduce potential COVID-19 transmission rates, and have made it part of our broad-based multi-modal district-wide infection control strategy. The most important component of the HVAC mechanicals are the air filters. We've recently updated our preventative routine on filter changes from twice per year to three times per year. We also clean the cooling and heating coil surfaces, disinfecting them with approved chemicals and methodology. In the HVAC systems that include wall-mounted or console-type induction units, the cabinets and fan compartments are vacuumed, washed, and sanitized as specified by the manufacturer on preventative maintenance routine.

On systems that allow it, a commercial HVAC system is typically designed to produce internal conditions with a relative humidity of 40-60%. Both the manufacturers and the commissioning agents require these standards to be met during installation and are checked on a yearly basis per our preventative maintenance plan. Our Ipswich Middle/High School HVAC is such a system that allows for a constant flow condition of relative humidity. We have performed and continue to perform ongoing various upgrades on our HVAC system at the Ipswich Middle/High School. These ongoing upgrades include moving the systems from pneumatic controls to DDC controls that allow for increasing airflow and efficiency. We have also updated the BMS software. This system maintains a constant induction of 15% outside air as a part of its design. Increasing the outside air rate or ventilation rate will likely result in increased energy usage and may result in mechanical difficulties to maintain the desired temperature and humidity within a building. In summation, IPS has taken prudent and practical preventative measures to improve air quality in our buildings and we are currently looking into additional methods to further increase air quality efficiency. Over the summer, the facilities department updated Univent system controls in both Elementary Schools and the IMHS, replaced 2 Exhaust fan systems at Winthrop School and Installed air Air Ionizers in the IMHS HVAC system.

Across our school district, we have roughly 600 individual filters within our HVAC systems. As stated previously, filters are now changed three times per year, using 1800 separate individual filters in any given year. We have a specific strategy moving forward during COVID-19 operations for our aged school buildings where we will utilize a mobile HEPA filter unit in addition to opening windows as much as possible for fresh air, plus the addition of enhanced and increased maintenance of our Univent units in these two buildings.

Ipswich Public Schools and the Ipswich Facilities Department will continue following practices as described and will engage in these activities to further reduce COVID-19 spreads risks:

1. HVAC preventative maintenance will be conducted as prescribed by the recognized industry standards and the preventative maintenance procedures we have established.
2. Facilities staff will confer with service providers to ensure timely service is delivered to our buildings.
3. Maintain and review with regularity all preventative maintenance and inspection records to ensure and confirm that duty of care has been provided.
4. Maintain HVAC systems with greater regularity to reduce COVID-19 and other infectious germ transmission potential.
5. In buildings with windows that open, we will open windows for regular airflow during the day and in the evening when possible.
6. The District has purchased a total of 72 Individual HEPA filter units for the Elementary classrooms, nurse stations/COVID-19 isolation rooms, and the Athletic Department at the high school.

Improvement Projects

Across the district, we are also engaging in construction projects to provide further safeguards and measures for all students and staff members. These projects include installing desk mounted safety glass in the main offices and the guidance office at the high school, replacing 12 exhaust fans and 2 air handler systems at the Doyon School, and installation of a secondary wall mounted hand sanitization system. We also made repairs to windows, doors and various areas as well as creating COVID-19 assessment and treatment areas.

Food Services

IPS fully intends to be able to accommodate every student or staff who needs a breakfast or lunch in the school district. The following safety measures have been put into practice:

- staying home if not feeling well
- wearing face coverings
- washing hands frequently
- regular cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting protocols
- COVID-19 training
- During meal times, students will practice social distancing to the extent possible while not wearing masks.

Transportation

The district will implement the following core practices on school buses:

- Masks: All staff and students on the bus, regardless of age, are required to wear masks at all times.
- Ventilation: Bus windows must remain open at all times, unless not possible due to extreme weather conditions.
- Seating: Elementary students will be seated by grade level.
- All school buses will be cleaned and disinfected at the end of each day.

Extracurricular Activities and Sports

The Ipswich Public Schools strives to provide additional learning and engagement opportunities to our students. Given the uncertainty of the pandemic, we are awaiting guidance from DESE and the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) regarding extra-curricular activities and sports. At this time, all sports and extracurricular activities are scheduled as normal. Updates will be provided as they become available regarding masking requirements or any other changes to a student's ability to participate.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS FOR 2021-2022

Section 1: Key definitions

This section outlines the list of COVID-19 symptoms, provides the definition of a close contact, and outlines situations where close contacts are exempt from COVID-19 testing and quarantine response protocols including isolation, quarantine, and Test and Stay.

COVID-19 symptoms

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves.

Unvaccinated individuals and any close contacts presenting these symptoms should follow testing and quarantine response protocols as outlined in Section 2 of this document.

Vaccinated individuals who are not close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols if they are experiencing symptoms in bold. These individuals may also seek clinical guidance to assess the need for PCR testing if they have other symptoms on this list.

COVID-19 symptoms list:

- **Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills**
- **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
- **New loss of taste or smell**
- **Muscle aches or body aches**
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Sore throat, *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Fatigue, *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms.*

Definition of a close contact

Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated.

In general, close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols in Section 2 of this document. However, certain close contacts are exempted from testing and quarantine response protocols as noted below.

Close contacts who are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols

The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:

- **Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts:** Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Classroom close contacts:** An individual who is exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom while both individuals were masked, so long as the individuals were spaced at least 3 feet apart, is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Bus close contacts:** Individuals on buses must be masked according to federal requirements. As such, individuals who are masked on buses when windows are open are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.

• **Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days:** An individual who has been previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and then becomes a close contact of someone with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols if:

- * The exposure occurred within 90 days of the onset of their own illness AND
- * The exposed individual is recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms.

(Note: To be a close contact, the 15 minutes must occur within a 24-hour period. Multiple brief or transitory interactions (less than a minute) throughout the day are unlikely to result in 15 minutes of cumulative contact and do not meet the definition of close contact. CDC definition of Close Contact. Available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schoolschildcare/operation-strategy.html>.)

Section 2: Recommended testing and quarantine response protocols

This section outlines testing and quarantine response protocols for individuals – students and staff – who test positive for COVID-19, close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols, and symptomatic individuals. Each scenario outlines the duration of any recommended quarantine or isolation, the conditions to be met in order for the individual to return to school, and any additional considerations.

Overview of Protocol Categories:

- Protocol A: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19
- Protocol B: Protocol for asymptomatic close contacts
- Protocol C: Protocol for symptomatic individuals

Protocol A: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19

Protocol A for individuals who test positive

- **Duration:** Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases is a minimum of 10 days after symptom onset or after positive PCR or antigen test, if asymptomatic.
- **Return to school:** After 10 days and once they have:
 - o Been without fever for 24 hours (and without taking fever-reducing medications); and
 - o Experienced improvement in other symptoms; and
 - o Individuals who do not meet these criteria after 10 days may receive clearance from either public health authority contact tracers (the local board of health or Community Tracing Collaborative) or school health professional before returning to school.
- **Note:** Return to school should be based on time and symptom resolution. Repeat testing prior to return is not recommended.

Protocol B: Protocol for asymptomatic close contacts

Close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols and are asymptomatic follow the guidelines in Protocol B below. Please recall that all asymptomatic, fully vaccinated individuals are exempt from close contact testing and quarantine response protocols and therefore do not need to follow Protocol B. However, fully vaccinated individuals are expected to monitor for symptoms and stay home and get tested if they experience symptoms, in alignment with statewide guidance and Protocol C.

Note: In some cases, individuals may be asked to follow specific testing and quarantine response protocols (including durations for quarantine/isolation) provided by contact tracers or local health officials which may differ from the recommended protocols below.

Protocol B for asymptomatic close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response

protocols

Districts who participate in the statewide COVID-19 testing program or another similar testing program are strongly encouraged to utilize the new Test and Stay (B-1) protocol option to minimize the amount of time individuals are out of school. This testing and quarantine response protocol has been shown to be generally equivalent to quarantine for school-based contacts, and a safe alternative to at-home isolation. If schools choose not to participate in the statewide COVID-19 testing program and do not participate in a similar testing initiative, unvaccinated individuals follow the traditional quarantine (B-2) protocol.

Individuals who are part of the Test and Stay protocols may be eligible to participate in school sports and extracurricular activities, provided that they are in compliance with the applicable protocol. For events and sports that take place on non-school days, testing will still be required on those days to participate. As part of Test and Stay, quarantine is still strongly recommended for individuals outside of school settings.

Guidance for People who are Fully Vaccinated Against COVID-19. Massachusetts DPH; August 2, 2021. Available at: <https://www.mass.gov/guidance/guidance-for-people-who-are-fully-vaccinated-against-covid-19> 7 Bernadette C Young, David W Eyre, Saroj Kendrick, Chris White, Sylvester Smith, et. al. “A cluster randomized trial of the impact of a policy of daily testing for contacts of COVID-19 cases on attendance and COVID-19 transmission in English secondary schools and colleges.” (July 2021). medRxiv. Available at: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.07.23.21260992v1>

Protocol B-1 (Recommended): Test and Stay

- **Duration of Test and Stay:** 7 days from the date of exposure
- **Return to School:** Close contacts can remain in school and do not have to quarantine, as long as they:
 - o Are asymptomatic
 - o Wear masks in school at all times, other than when eating or drinking. When these individuals cannot be masked (i.e., when eating or drinking) they should maintain 3 feet of distance from other individuals to the extent feasible.
 - o Take a rapid antigen test (e.g., BinaxNOW) on each school day and receive a negative result. When the 7 days from date of exposure includes weekends or holidays, individuals should quarantine on weekends, and if they remain asymptomatic, upon return to school be tested immediately. If the individual remains negative, they can stay in school.
 - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14, and self-isolate at home if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or develops symptoms during the Test and Stay period or the 14 days following initial exposure, they should follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they should follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

Protocol B-2: Traditional protocol (if school does not have access to rapid daily testing or family or adult individual chooses not to participate in Test and Stay)

- **Duration:** Quarantine is at least 7 days from the date of exposure
- **Return to School:** After 7 days, returning on day 8, provided that they:
 - o Remain asymptomatic
 - o Receive a COVID test (PCR or rapid antigen) on day 5 or later and receive a negative result
 - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14, and self-isolate if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or within the 14 days following initial exposure, they follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

Protocol B-3: Alternate protocol for those who choose not to receive a COVID test

- **Duration:** Quarantine is at least 10 days from the date of exposure⁸
- **Return to School:** After 10 days, returning on day 11, provided that they:
 - o Have not experienced symptoms up to this point
 - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14 and self-isolate if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or within the 14 days following initial exposure, they follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

CDC Science Brief: Options to Reduce Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing. Dec 2, 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>.

Protocol C: Protocol for symptomatic individuals

Protocol C applies to **vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals** who experience the COVID19 symptoms listed in Section 1 applicable to their status.

Protocol C for symptomatic individuals:

Protocol C-1 (Recommended): Return to school post-symptoms with test

- **Duration:** Dependent on symptom resolution
- **Return to School:** Individuals may return to school after they:
 - o Have received a negative PCR test result for COVID-19. Note: So long as the individual is not a close contact, if a medical professional makes an alternative diagnosis for the COVID-19-like symptoms, the individual may use this recommendation (e.g., for influenza or strep pharyngitis) in lieu of a PCR test.
 - o Have improvement in symptoms
 - o Have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- **Note:** If the symptomatic individual was a **close contact** who is not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols, after symptoms resolve and they receive a negative PCR test, they should follow Protocol B-1 for Test and Stay.
 - o If Test and Stay is not available or the family or adult individual opts not to participate, they follow Protocol B-2 or B-3.

Protocol C-2: Alternative protocol for symptomatic individuals who are not close contacts and choose not to receive a COVID test to return to school

- **Duration:** Isolation is at least 10 days from symptom onset
- **Return to School:** After 10 days, returning on day 11, assuming they:
 - o Have improvement in symptoms
 - o Have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

CDC Interim Guidance on Ending Isolation and Precautions for Adults with COVID-19. Mar 16, 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html>.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who should receive a diagnostic test?

- If staff or students are a close contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19, they should be tested and should follow the protocols outlined in Protocol B, unless they are exempted, as outlined above.
- If staff or students have COVID-19 symptoms, they should be tested and follow the protocols outlined in Protocol C.

Where can individuals receive an individual PCR test?

- Every school should have a list of available test sites. Massachusetts has an interactive testing map. Staff and students who have symptoms should also contact their primary care provider for further instructions.

When and how should BinaxNOW tests be used for diagnostic purposes?

- The BinaxNOW test is a rapid antigen test. Rapid antigen tests perform best when the person is tested in the early stages of infection with COVID-19, when the viral load is generally highest.
- When a student or staff member presents to the school health office with any symptom from the list in Section 1, they should receive a BinaxNOW test if available.
 - o If the result is positive, they should be sent home and follow Protocol A.
 - o If the result is negative, they should be sent home. The student's parent/guardian, or the staff member, should be informed that the negative test is presumptive and they should follow Protocol C.
- Note: BinaxNOW tests are less sensitive and less specific than PCR tests. PCR confirmation is recommended for asymptomatic persons with a positive BinaxNOW test, and for symptomatic persons with a negative test, unless those symptoms are unlikely to be due to COVID-19. If the results are discordant, for the purposes of these protocols the PCR result would be taken as the true result, assuming the two tests are done within 2 days of each other.

How should schools address individuals with mild symptoms?

- If an individual has mild symptoms, the individual may be considered for testing using BinaxNOW, if available.
 - o If the result is positive, they should be sent home and follow Protocol A.
 - o If the result is negative, they should remain in school.
 - o If the minimal symptom(s) persist, the individual may be re-tested within the subsequent 3 days. If symptoms worsen, the individual should seek medical care and be evaluated for the need for PCR testing.

How does contact tracing occur?

- When a person has a positive COVID-19 test, the local board of health or the Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative will reach out to provide support so the individual can remain safely in medical isolation. They will also ask for help to identify close contacts.
- These organizations will then reach out to the individual's close contacts to provide information to help stop the spread of the virus, including how to safely quarantine.

- To further assist with contact tracing, the student/family and staff are asked to reach out to their personal contacts and notify the school. The school should also support contact tracing efforts within the school to the extent feasible.

What additional steps should schools take if someone presents symptoms of COVID-19?

- If someone is symptomatic at school or on the bus, they should be masked immediately and evaluated by the school health professional for symptoms.
- If an individual has COVID-19 symptoms as outlined in Section 1, they should be masked, and when feasible, be in a separate room with the door closed until they can be picked up.

What additional steps should schools take if someone tests positive for COVID-19?

- Determine if the individual was at school in the two days prior to symptom onset (or testing positive if asymptomatic) and until isolation.
 - o If so, clean and disinfect the spaces an individual spent time in, if they have not already been cleaned.
- Note that for districts participating in the statewide testing program designated school staff and parents/caregivers will receive results of each individual COVID test a student takes through the testing software platform.
- Communicate with families and staff of close contacts, including informing them that:
 - o There was a positive test (do not name the specific individual)
 - o Explain that the student/staff is a “close contact” and therefore should follow the protocols for close contacts outlined in Protocol B.
 - o Remind individuals of the list of COVID-19 symptoms to monitor for (see Section 1).
 - o Ask them to communicate external test results to the school.
- If the school finds out about the COVID-19 positive test in the middle of the school day:
 - o Make sure students who are close contacts are wearing masks.
 - o If close contacts are symptomatic, they should be masked, and when feasible, be in a separate room with the door closed until they can be picked up.

What should districts and schools do if they have a high volume of cases?

- Districts and schools can contact the DESE Rapid Response Help Center at 781-338-3500 for guidance if they are experiencing a high volume of cases. Notification should also be provided to local boards of health and district leadership.