

August 13, 2021

Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents, Collaboratives and Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools,

As a follow up to the [guidance](#) released on July 30 and to the information released earlier this week on the [statewide COVID-19 testing program](#), attached please find [DESE and DPH's testing and quarantine guidance](#) for districts and schools for the fall. We strongly encourage districts to have a robust COVID testing program available to implement these protocols. DESE is [accepting applications](#) on a rolling basis with a priority deadline of August 20.

While more streamlined than last year's version, this continues to be a detailed document which is intended to be used by school health professionals, COVID-19 site leaders, and others who will be involved in the day-to-day management of testing and quarantine at the district and school levels. We will publish flow charts to accompany this guidance shortly.

Below please find a summary of the guidance:

- New Test and Stay program will allow asymptomatic close contacts to remain in school and participate in sports and extracurriculars so long as they take a rapid antigen test daily, wear a mask, and follow other guidelines as noted in the document.
  - Please note that for unvaccinated close contacts participating in the Test and Stay program **only**, it is recommended to maintain 3 feet of distance when masks cannot be worn (i.e. during meals). This should not be construed as a broad physical distancing requirement or recommendation; it is only in place as part of this single, narrow protocol. We will issue an FAQ to continue to clarify that all school-wide distancing requirements are lifted.
- If districts do not have Test and Stay available, or an individual or family chooses not to participate, a close contact will need to quarantine at home for at least 7 days from the point of exposure.
- The list of close contacts who do not need to participate in testing and quarantine protocols has been updated to include individuals on school buses, when students are masked with windows open, regardless of distancing. In addition, the following groups continue to be exempt from testing and quarantine: asymptomatic, vaccinated close contacts; classroom close contacts spaced at least three feet apart while students are masked; and individuals who have had COVID-19 in the past 90 days.
- The COVID-19 symptoms list has been updated (with more symptoms being identified as COVID-19 symptoms only when "in combination with other symptoms"), along with some points of differentiation in COVID-19 symptoms necessitating a PCR test for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. Individuals with COVID-19 symptoms should continue to stay home until symptoms resolve.

- Districts and schools may continue to test students with mild symptoms with BinaxNOW tests, if available. So long as these tests are negative, individuals with mild symptoms should remain in school.
- Weekly COVID pooled testing remains strongly recommended for unvaccinated individuals. Vaccinated individuals may still participate at their discretion; however this is not recommended.
- As noted last year, if a student tests positive or presents COVID-19 symptoms during the school day, they should be masked, and when feasible, be in a separate room with the door closed until they can be picked up.

As a reminder, all health and safety requirements issued by DESE from the previous school year have been lifted, and all schools are required to be in-person full-time, five days per week. Our guidance issued on July 30 for the fall strongly recommends that districts and schools implement masking for unvaccinated individuals and notes that masking on buses for all individuals is a current federal requirement for all schools and districts. This guidance also stated that DESE and DPH also continue to encourage schools to maintain ventilation upgrades from this past year as feasible, continue hand hygiene practices, and extend policies for students and staff to stay home when sick.

As always, we will monitor the public health situation and may issue additional guidance as needed.

Jeffery C. Riley  
Commissioner