



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Leaders of Educational Collaboratives, Approved Special Education Schools, and Private Schools
From: Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
Date: August 11, 2021
Subject: SY2021-22 COVID-19 Testing Program for Districts and Schools

I am writing to you today to provide you with the information you will need to sign up for our statewide no-cost COVID-19 testing program. We are pleased to announce that all K-12 COVID-19 testing will be delivered through CIC Health for the 2021-22 school year. We hope that you will sign up for our program by our priority deadline of August 20, 2021 so that CIC Health can begin to provide testing services for your students and staff as soon as possible. Based upon what we learned from schools and districts who implemented our testing services last year, we have made many enhancements to our program which we describe in detail in this memo. Thank you for supporting our shared interest in maintaining safe and healthy schools for our students, staff, and family members.

Background

During the 2020-21 school year, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) introduced COVID-19 screening and diagnostic testing in the school setting as an additional mitigation strategy for COVID-19, the first program of its kind nationwide. Districts and schools participating in the program received the test kits, support from a testing service provider, and the testing software to track results, all at no cost. Through June 30, 2021, participating schools tested over 155,000 pools (more than 1 million samples) with a pool positivity rate of 0.58 percent. Further, more than 1,000 schools enrolled in the pooled testing initiative, and more than 343,000 students, educators and staff were eligible to be tested on a weekly basis.

As noted in the [DESE/DPH COVID-19 Guidance for Districts and Schools: Fall 2021](#) released on July 30, 2021, districts and schools are highly encouraged to maintain or establish a robust plan for COVID-19 testing in schools, including both diagnostic¹ testing and routine (weekly) COVID pooled testing.² Diagnostic testing is an important tool for use in testing asymptomatic close contacts as part of the updated “Test and Stay” COVID-19 response protocols. Diagnostic testing will be especially important this year, as we head into cold and flu season. Further, recent

¹ Diagnostic testing is individual testing to determine if someone is currently infected with COVID-19.

² Routine COVID pooled testing involve mixing several test samples together and then testing the group sample with a PCR test for detection of COVID-19.

research indicates that increased screening testing for exposures is at least as effective as quarantine at limiting infections.³ DESE will soon release the updated Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios for contact tracing, quarantine, and all testing protocols. Once released, the updated protocols will be posted to the [On the Desktop](#) section of the DESE website.

As mentioned previously, DESE and the EOHHS will continue to offer these services at no cost to districts and schools. These no-cost services will include optional support for districts who would like additional staff to conduct testing on-site and/or help with testing logistics and communication.

After careful review of this memo, regardless of whether they participated in the state funded COVID-19 testing program during the 2020-21 school year, all districts and schools that are interested in participating in the SY22 program **must** complete an [Authorized School application](#)⁴ to indicate their preferred testing method and upload other required documents. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, but priority will be given to districts and schools that apply by August 20, 2021.

Questions related to this initiative should be sent to k12COVID19testing@mass.gov.

Description of SY22 COVID-19 Testing Program and the Required Process for Participation

Following a competitive procurement process, EOHHS and DESE are making diagnostic and routine (weekly) COVID pooled testing services available at no cost to participating districts and schools through the end of the 2021-22 school year, under a single contract with the testing provider CIC Health. Districts and schools should read each of the three sections below to learn about the testing services offered by CIC Health, the types of COVID-19 testing options, and the process to participate:

- [Section 1](#): Testing Services
- [Section 2](#): COVID-19 Testing Options
- [Section 3](#): District and School Application Process

Section 1: Testing Services

[CIC Health](#) will provide any combination of the below services to participating districts and schools, based on their needs. Districts and schools will work directly with CIC Health to manage the depth and breadth of services:

- *Onsite test specimen collectors and/or observers*: If requested, CIC Health can provide trained professionals to administer specimen collection and/or observe self-collection to

³ Motta et al., June 18, 2021. "Benefits of Surveillance Testing and Quarantine in a SARS-CoV-2 Vaccinated Population of Students on a University Campus." Preprint Study. Available at: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.06.15.21258928v1>

⁴ The full link to the Authorized School application can be found here:

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6473918/SY22-Authorized-School-Application-COVID-19-Testing-Program>

students and staff through, for example, a subcontract with an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) service provider or other health staffing agency. Trained professionals may be available to support all aspects of the COVID-19 testing program, including but not limited to; diagnostic testing for symptomatic individuals, testing close contacts participating in the “Test and Stay” program, and administering routine COVID pooled testing.

- *District-level program coordinator:* If requested, CIC Health can provide an individual at the district-level that would oversee and coordinate aspects of the COVID-19 testing programs across all schools. While this individual would be an employee of CIC Health or its subcontractors, they would act at the direction of district leadership to deploy the COVID-19 Testing Program at each participating school.
- *Onsite school testing coordinator:* If requested, CIC Health can provide an individual on an hourly basis to support the onsite management and operations of the COVID-19 testing program at an individual school. Management support may include, but is not limited to, the ordering process for BinaxNOW tests from DPH, assigning individuals to routine COVID pooled tests, support identifying close contacts, and overseeing the consent and software registration process.
- *Operations and logistics of COVID-19 testing:* CIC Health will procure, supply, and ship to the district the physical materials needed for testing, including swabs, test tubes, label printers, and any other necessary materials. CIC Health will help manage the BinaxNOW ordering process from DPH, including supporting the school and district in satisfying the preconditions for testing.
- *Training:* CIC Health will conduct “train the trainer” style training to support school districts with launch, including how to collect, store, and label samples, as well as how to use the software associated with COVID-19 testing. Training will also include the steps necessary to obtain consent for testing and an overview of the DESE/DPH approved protocols that schools should follow in the case of a positive or negative result. Each district is then responsible for disseminating the training information within their own school communities, as necessary.
- *Software associated with pooled testing:* CIC Health will supply a software platform that schools will use to enter test information, order supplies, track test results, and centralize other necessary testing information. The platform will return test results within 24 hours of the lab receiving the samples.
- *Technical assistance/customer support to district/school personnel:* CIC Health will provide customer service solutions for the district. They will work directly with the testing coordinator or other district or school administrators to troubleshoot on topics including delivery issues, specimen collection, labeling tubes, transporting samples, test results, isolation and quarantine protocols, and training.
- *Transportation of specimen from the school to the laboratory:* CIC Health will offer a daily courier service or other same-day shipping service to deliver tests to the laboratory.

Section 2: COVID-19 Testing Options

Districts and schools may choose between the below options when completing the Authorized School Application. Participating districts and schools are welcome to change or add testing

options throughout the school year; however, to minimize the impact of quarantining due to exposure to COVID-19, it is strongly recommended districts participate in both diagnostic components of the COVID-19 testing program in accordance.

Diagnostic Testing:

- *Symptomatic Testing:* (for when individuals present symptoms while at school; individuals should not go to school if experiencing symptoms while at home): Shallow nasal swab samples are collected at school using the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test or another approved diagnostic test.
- *“Test and Stay” (close contact testing):* Shallow nasal swab samples are collected at school using the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test or another approved diagnostic test. Tests are administered daily from the first day of exposure for at least five (5) days.

Routine COVID Pooled Testing:

Please note, following feedback from families and caregivers, districts may choose to use the phrase “routine COVID safety check” as an alternative name for “pooled testing.” Parent facing materials (e.g., letter to families and consent form) use this terminology.

- *Routine COVID Pooled Testing and School-Based Follow-Up Testing:* Shallow nasal swab samples are collected at school and put into a single tube (maximum of 10 samples per tube). If a group tests positive, individual Follow-Up testing with a second sample collection occurs at the school with BinaxNOW and/or individual PCR testing, as necessary.
- *Routine COVID Pooled Testing and Lab-Based Follow-Up Testing:* Shallow nasal swab or saliva samples are collected and kept separate before being grouped at the lab. If a group tests positive, individual Follow-Up testing occurs at the lab, without a second sample collection. Individual test results are reported to the school.

Section 3: District and School Application Process

All districts and schools, regardless if they participated in the SY21 state-funded COVID-19 testing program, must submit an [Authorized School Application](#) to formally apply to participate in the SY22 program. Priority will be given to districts and school that apply by August 20, 2021.

- *Authorized School Application:* The district or school must apply to participate in the program. This application includes detailed information about the specific schools participating in the initiative, including projections on the number of students and staff to be tested and preferences about the operations of the program at each school (sample

collection location, need for shipping or other services, etc.). [Click here](#) to complete the Authorized School application.⁵

- Please note districts and organizations with multiple schools must fill out a single application on behalf of all schools in their district or organization. Districts and schools must provide specific school-level information as part of the application. The school spreadsheet can be found on the [COVID-19 Testing section](#) of the DESE website, but it needs to be uploaded as part of the application.
- As part of the Authorized School Application, each school within a district that will be administering the BinaxNOW tests on-site (for symptomatic, Test and Stay, or school-based follow up testing) are eligible to participate as temporary sites under a statewide CLIA Certificate of Waiver. To qualify as a temporary site, schools and districts must complete [the brief form](#) with the requisite information included in the application. Additional assurances for administration of BinaxNOW will be sought in the Authorized School Application, such as assurance that any school personnel administering BinaxNOW tests will complete the online training prior to test administration and the school will maintain the proper PPE required for testing for any staff administering BinaxNOW tests. See Appendix A below for more information.
- *Statement of Assurances:* To support the effective administration of this program, as well as the safe administration of COVID-19 testing, districts and schools must agree to a series of assurances before they are authorized to access the COVID-19 testing program. The appropriate signatory must be an individual with the authority to agree to the terms outlined in the Statement of Assurances, such as the superintendent or executive director. The Statement of Assurances provides an overview of the responsibilities of schools and districts, and the requirements for the testing program. The preconditions to testing can be found in Appendix A below. Noncompliance with the assurances may result in the termination of services. Districts and schools will be asked to upload this document as an attachment to their Authorized School application. The document can also be found on the [COVID-19 Testing section](#) of the DESE website, but it needs to be uploaded as part of the Authorized School application (see above).

After districts and schools submit the Authorized School Application and Statement of Assurances, DESE and EOHHS will connect districts and schools with CIC Health directly.

Districts and schools that seek to contract with a COVID-19 testing vendor outside of the state-funded testing program should follow their local procurement processes to obtain quotes and contract for services. It is the responsibility of the district or school to pay for pooled testing services rendered outside of this state-funded pooled testing program. Districts seeking reimbursement for testing services outside of the statewide COVID-19 testing program should connect with their local municipality for information on reimbursements through FEMA. Districts may email disaster.recovery@mass.gov for more information.

⁵ The full link to the Authorized School Application can be found here: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6473918/SY22-Authorized-School-Application-COVID-19-Testing-Program>

Appendix A: Preconditions for COVID-19 Testing

All participating districts and schools must complete the following preconditions before testing begins.

1. *Obtain Consent from Individuals to be Tested and to Report Individual Test Results to the Department of Public Health (DPH):*

Consent is required for an individual to participate in COVID-19 diagnostic and screening testing and to report diagnostic test results to DPH via the software platform provided by CIC Health. Individuals must agree to all terms to be tested.

Districts and schools must make advance preparations to obtain consent from individuals to: (a) administer screening testing; (b) administer diagnostic testing, and (c) share individual test results with DPH via the software platform provided by CIC Health. All three components of consent are included in the single COVID-19 testing consent form provided by DESE; individuals who do not provide all three components of consent cannot participate in any aspect of the COVID-19 testing program. This is to allow districts and schools to change testing modalities (e.g., from routine COVID pooled testing to close contact testing) without needing to gather additional consents. Districts must provide families and staff with clear messages on which type(s) of testing are being performed before any changes. Districts and schools may share students' personally identifiable information with CIC Health *only* after receipt of consent from parents/guardians or individuals who can consent for themselves.

Districts and schools should consult with CIC Health regarding the best method to obtain consent. The sample consent form for COVID-19 testing can be found on the [COVID-19 Testing section](#) of the DESE website.

2. *Applying for coverage under statewide CLIA Certificate of Waiver (for BinaxNOW administration only)*

Schools and districts administering BinaxNOW are eligible to participate as temporary sites under a statewide CLIA Certificate of Waiver. To qualify as a temporary site, schools and districts must complete this brief form with the requisite information:

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6158268/Application-for-coverage-under-a-statewide-CLIA-Certificate-of-Waiver>

Each school within a district that will be administering the BinaxNOW tests on-site will need to complete the application separately. A superintendent, charter leader or executive director should complete the application on behalf of the schools in their district or network.

3. *Ensuring all district and school staff complete training requirements*

Any staff administering COVID-19 testing within a school or district must complete all training modules offered by CIC Health. Any staff administering the BinaxNOW test must also completed the training modules offered by Abbott. The training modules can be found [here](#).

School personnel administering BinaxNOW are also invited to participate in train-the-trainer sessions offered by DPH's School Health Unit. Please note, BinaxNOW test kits must be on location prior to the training. To sign up for a training, district and school personnel may go to the [BU Shield website](#).

4. Reporting Individual Test Results:

If school staff are administering individual tests, they should ensure that all such results are entered into the platform offered by CIC Health as tests are performed, and by no later than the end of the day the test was performed. The software system managed by CIC Health will report the results of all individual follow-up tests to DPH.

In addition to automated reports of all tests results to DPH, district and school staff must report individual test results to the individual who was tested or, if the individual is a student, to the person who consented to the testing (i.e., the student's parent/guardian). Districts do not need to report positive results to DESE.

5. Maintaining Adequate Supply of Personal Protective Equipment:

Any staff administering testing must wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when conducting tests and handling patient specimens. For personnel collecting specimens, the following PPE is required:

- N95 mask or higher-level respirator (a surgical mask can be used only if an N95 is not available)
- Eye protection
- Gloves
- Gown, when collecting specimens

For personnel observing the self-administration of specimen collection, the following PPE is required:

- Surgical mask

Refer to [DPH Comprehensive PPE Guidance](#) or contact your local board of health for further information regarding the proper use of PPE.