

Test to Stay Pilot Program

Background

Given the established benefits of in-person learning, many kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) school administrators and public health officials are implementing strategies to limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) and to facilitate safe, in-person learning. The State of Illinois has adopted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) updated [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 schools](#) (updated 8/5/2021). Mitigation strategies such as universal masking, physical distancing, improved hand hygiene and cleaning practices, and contact tracing have been used to reduce in-school COVID-19 transmission (1). However, routine SARS-CoV-2 testing is not commonly implemented and provides an additional layer of protection helping identify COVID-19 positive cases. Additionally, the currently prominent B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant is highly aggressive and contagious, with high viral loads, greater potential for severe illness for the unvaccinated, and substantial transmission possibly occurring in fully vaccinated people (2). In a recent outbreak report associated with large public gatherings of tourists from across the United States to Massachusetts in July 2021, 469 COVID-19 positive cases were identified, and 346 (74%) of those occurred in fully vaccinated individuals (3). Further supporting the need for a comprehensive prevention strategy that includes routine testing.

The Lake County Health Department (LCHD) strongly encourages screening testing of all partially/unvaccinated staff and students (at least twice a week with a rapid antigen or PCR test) to rapidly identify and isolate those infected with COVID-19. Testing can also be used to keep students and staff in school when identified as a close contact at school or school activities through the Test to Stay protocol. This allows asymptomatic, unvaccinated/partially vaccinated students and staff to stay in school by testing on days one, three, five, and seven after exposure to COVID-19 if they continue to test negative and remain asymptomatic. LCHD will provide the option of a Test to Stay Program on a pilot basis for participating Lake County schools during Fall 2021, effective August 11, 2021. Any school in Lake County, which meets the eligibility criteria, may choose to implement the Test to Stay protocol to support in-person learning. **Please note: Test to Stay only applies for participation in school and school-related activities, where mask-wearing is mandatory at school. Students or staff in Test to Stay must quarantine at home for at least 7 days (up to 14 days) when outside of the school or school-related activities.**

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The CDC defines a close contact in the classroom setting as unvaccinated/partially vaccinated classroom students who are <3 feet from a COVID-19-infected student or staff. Close contacts are required to quarantine for at least 10 days from the last exposure date¹. Classroom students who were 3 to 6 feet from an infected student/staff are not considered close contacts and do not require quarantine as long as both the case and the contact were engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting mask and other K–12 school prevention strategies (such as proper indoor masking; cohorting; screening testing; improved ventilation; handwashing or use of alcohol-based hand rubs; staying home when sick with symptoms of infectious illness, including COVID-19; and regular disinfection and cleaning of frequently-touched surfaces) were in place in the K–12 setting. If they were not consistently masked, then close contacts are classroom students or staff who were within 6 feet of the infected student or staff for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.

Schools may choose not to participate in the Test to Stay program and LCHD may still require unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts (within 3 feet with masking of both the infected person and close contact, or within 6 feet with improper masking) in the classroom to quarantine. The ideal quarantine period is 14 days from the last date of exposure. Students may not return to sports, other activities, or the school bus for 14 days if social distancing of 3–6 feet and mask-wearing cannot be maintained.

A reduced option 10-day quarantine is allowable if close contacts can return to school maintaining a social distance of at least 3 feet and mask-wearing during days 11–14 post-exposure. Students may not return to sports, other activities, or the school bus for 14 days if social distancing of 3–6 feet and mask-wearing cannot be maintained.

The Lake County Health Department will consider 7-day quarantines for close contacts to return to school

¹ On February 8, 2021, LCHD adopted a shortened quarantine option of 10 days with symptom monitoring for 14 days for close contacts identified through contact tracing efforts in Lake County, Illinois. Close contacts are eligible on a case-by-case basis, after receiving authorization from the LCHD, for a reduced quarantine option for 7 days. However, LCHD reserves the right to mandate a 14-day quarantine if there is an outbreak.

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on a case-by-case basis for exposures at school or outside of school under specific circumstances. A school nurse or school point of contact **may not** authorize a 7-day quarantine, and the individual/parent or guardian must speak with LCHD contact tracers. Contact tracers will communicate the approved reduced quarantine to the school point of contact/nurse.

- Both the positive case and close contact need to have been masked at the time of exposure
- The close contact or their parent or guardian must respond to calls from LCHD contact tracers to get a 7-day quarantine approved by the LCHD
- The individual must be tested with a PCR test within 48 hours (Day 6 or Day 7) prior to day 7 and provide the negative test result to the school nurse. Home tests and antigen tests **are not** approved for this purpose.
- Students may not return to sports, other activities, or the school bus for 14 days if social distancing of 3–6 feet and mask wearing cannot be maintained.

Eligibility

Schools who participate in the Test to Stay program must follow the below criteria:

- Schools must be in Lake County, Illinois.
- Schools must agree to implement a Test to Stay Protocol and inform LCHD of intent to participate in the Test to Stay program.
- School should have the ability and capacity to test close contacts on Day 1, Day 3, Day 5, and Day 7 after exposure.
- Testing can be completed by a PCR or rapid antigen test, or a molecular test authorized by FDA for emergency use (EUA). At home COVID-19 test kits **do not** apply.
- Schools must report both positive and negative test results to IDPH and LCHD within 24 hours through the appropriate reporting system.
- Schools must follow mitigation strategies, including:

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- Minimum desk/seating distancing of 3 feet in classrooms
- Universal masking regardless of vaccination status
- Proper hand hygiene implementation
- School nurse or designee must be available to conduct preliminary interviews with teachers and staff to determine activities and if a lapse in mitigation strategies occurred during the exposure.
- School nurse or designee must be able to collect all test-related data and provide to LCHD.
- School staff must be forthcoming and transparent with details regarding activities in the school, and available for interviews by school nurse, school designee, or LCHD case investigator/contact tracer.

Eligibility for the Test to Stay Program:

- Test to Stay is only applicable when both the COVID-19-confirmed case and close contact were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks, regardless of vaccination status.
- Test to Stay may be used for in-school or school-sponsored event exposures, for both students and staff who are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated.

Test to Stay Protocol for Schools

- Testing can be completed by a PCR or rapid antigen test, or a molecular test authorized by FDA for emergency use (EUA). At home COVID-19 test kits **do not** apply.
- When testing is not possible due to weekends and holidays, students and staff who are not fully vaccinated should be tested at the earliest possible opportunity at any community testing site.
- When informed of a positive case of COVID-19 in a staff member or student, identify close contacts based on possible COVID-19 exposure risks and locations. A school nurse or school designee should assess for:
 - Lapses in mitigation protocol (i.e., mask-wearing, high-risk activities, etc.)
 - Activities that involve behaviors that could increase risk of COVID-19 such as:

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- Singing or shouting;
- Physical exertion or heavy breathing;
- Inability to wear a mask.
- Questions to ask:
 - Did the positive case maintain proper mask use?
 - Did all class members and staff maintain proper mask use?
 - Did the student's classroom have mask breaks apart from lunch/eating?
 - If masks were not maintained during exposure were students or staff 6 feet apart?
 - How many unvaccinated or partially vaccinated close contacts were present during the exposure?
- Determine if there are unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts who would need to quarantine or are eligible for Test to Stay. **The school nurse or school designee should make this initial determination.**
- Determine if Test to Stay is applicable. (Follow LCHD Test to Stay Checklist)
- The school nurse or designee should verify:
 - The exposure to COVID-19 occurred at school or a school-sponsored activity,
 - Close contact students or staff are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated,
 - The school has a universal mask-wearing policy regardless of vaccination status,
 - **Both the case and close contacts were engaged in correct use of well-fitting masks at the time of exposure, AND**
 - Resources are available to test close contacts for COVID-19 at school on days 1, 3, 5, and 7, and report results to LCHD and IDPH.
- After the school nurse or designee determines that appropriate mitigation strategies were followed, the following close contacts may be eligible for Test to Stay:
- **In-classroom exposure:** Close contacts within 3 feet from a COVID-19 positive student or staff.

- **Outside classroom but in school exposure:** Close contacts who are exposed on the school bus or during extracurricular activities including high-risk extracurricular activities such as Band, Chorus, Drama, and Performing Arts with (masking between an infected person and close contacts) will be eligible for Test to Stay. Close contacts unmasked at 6 feet of distance may be

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considered for Test to Stay on a case-by-case basis.

- **School-related sports exposure:** Sports exposures will be assessed by LCHD on a case-by-case basis for Test to Stay. If any lapses or breaches in mitigation strategies including off the field (i.e., locker room or sports-team gatherings/parties), Test to Stay may not apply.
- **Lunch exposure:** Unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts who are exposed during lunch (while seated **at 6 feet**) from a COVID-19 positive student or staff.

When test to stay does not apply:

- **Inadequate mask-wearing:** If masks are not worn while within 6 feet during the exposure, these unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts **will not** qualify for Test to Stay and must quarantine for at least 10 days from last the exposure date.
- **Non-compliant with testing:** If unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts are not compliant with testing; this means an individual did not complete two opportunities of COVID-19 testing in a row, they will no longer be eligible for Test to Stay. For example, if a child or a parent refuses to test on Day 5 and subsequently express refusal for Day 7 test, the child will no longer be eligible for Test to Stay and must quarantine.
- **Outside of school, community exposure (including non-school related sports events:** Unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts who were exposed to COVID-19 from the community, outside of the school, are eligible for a reduced quarantine (for 7 days instead of 10 days from last exposure date) by PCR testing negative on day 6–7 after receiving authorization from the LCHD.
 - If the student tests positive on days 6–7 then they are not eligible for the reduced quarantine.
- **Household exposure:** Unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts with household members who test positive for COVID-19 will not qualify for Test to Stay and must quarantine for at least 10 days from the last exposure date.
- **Lunch exposure:** Unvaccinated/partially vaccinated close contacts who are exposed during lunch within 6 feet from a COVID-19 positive student or staff are considered close contacts. They must quarantine for at least 10 days from the last exposure date.

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- **Symptomatic individuals:** Any exposed staff or students identified as having symptoms of COVID-19 should be sent home and tested for COVID-19.

Protocol for unvaccinated/partially vaccinated / partially vaccinated in-school close contacts who are eligible for Test to stay:

- Complete a [LCHD Redcap](#) to report the case and identified close contacts. Please make sure to indicate the close contacts who were given a preliminary recommendation of quarantine and those who were given a recommendation of Test to Stay. In the event a school nurse or designee are uncertain of what preliminary recommendations to make, please make the conservative decision to quarantine, complete a RedCap, and wait for further instructions from LCHD.
- A school nurse or designee will need to complete a line list for all COVID-19 positive students or staff, all unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, and fully vaccinated close contacts.
- Unvaccinated and partially vaccinated close contacts who are eligible for Test to Stay should get tested at school on Days 1, 3, 5, and 7 from the last exposure date. At home COVID-19 test kits **do not** apply.
- Unvaccinated and partially vaccinated close contacts are permitted to remain in the classroom and participate in school-sponsored extracurricular activities if the results are negative and they remain asymptomatic. School nurses should follow the IDPH decision tree for symptomatic close contacts.
- Close contacts should monitor symptoms for 14 days and inform appropriate school staff if symptoms develop.
- Close contacts must ensure mask-wearing occurs in all indoor settings related to school in the 14 days.
- Shield Test (saliva test) is not a confirmatory test. Therefore, LCHD may request a confirmatory (nasal swab, lab-processed) PCR test in specific situations involving high-risk activity or a symptomatic individual with a negative Shield test or rapid antigen test.

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- School nurses will be provided with training and supplementary documents to report to the local health department all four COVID-19 test results for each close contact.
- School nurses will be responsible for reporting all positive and negative results to IDPH through this link: <https://redcap.link/dph.illinois.gov.pocovid19registration>

Protocol for fully vaccinated in-school close contacts:

Fully vaccinated individuals (≥2 weeks from the second dose of a 2-dose series or only one dose of a 1-dose series) or students infected within the past 90 days do not need to quarantine after exposure to an infected person as long as they remain asymptomatic.

- School staff will need to verify that students or staff received and completed a vaccination series.
- IF there is no school outbreak, fully vaccinated students who are close contacts are recommended to get tested by a PCR test once between day 3–5 from the last exposure date. A school outbreak is defined as 2 or more positive COVID-19 cases within a 14 day- period in epidemiology-linked students and/or staff.
- IF there is a school outbreak, fully vaccinated students who are close contacts should get serial testing on day 1, 3, 5, 7 using school onsite testing (Binax or Shield), or PCR testing.
- Students and their parents/guardians should monitor for symptoms for 14 days from the last exposure date. Close contacts must remain asymptomatic to continue attending school. Close contacts should be aware of the process to inform appropriate school staff if symptoms develop.
- If symptoms develop in the 14 days from the last exposure, the symptomatic individual should stay home, inform the school nurse, and get confirmatory PCR testing for COVID-19.
- Close contacts must ensure consistent mask-wearing occurs in all indoor school settings for 14 days following the exposure.
- Schools must continue to report all positive cases of COVID-19 to the Lake County Health Department. Reporting instructions for cases and close contacts in [LCHD RedCap](#) will not

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change

- Once LCHD obtains the RedCap report, they will communicate with the school's point of contact to review the preliminary information and recommendations.
- A LCHD representative may follow up with school staff/nurse via phone or survey to track if additional cases were identified following classroom exposure. Nurses will need to keep track of students in Test to Stay and quarantined. Nurses will be asked to report positive and negative test results from Test to Stay and from vaccinated close contacts to LCHD.
- The LCHD team will conduct the case investigation, contact tracing, and follow-up. Please note that if new findings are discovered or if the situation evolves to include additional cases, the preliminary quarantine or Test to Stay recommendations may be changed by LCHD. As per LCHD protocol, follow-up findings and updated recommendations will be provided to the school and parents.

Results

Data obtained from the RedCap reporting tool will be monitored for investigations that may be associated with school transmission of COVID-19. We encourage participating schools to proactively report cases suspected to have been associated with school transmission.

Point of Contact

For any questions or concerns, please email Pat Brady, Pbrady2@lakecountyiil.gov, and Leia Muller Lmueller@lakecountyiil.gov.

References:

1. CDC, CDC. Community, Work, and School [Internet]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020 [cited 2021 Aug 11]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>
2. CDC. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) [Internet]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020 [cited 2021 Aug 11]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html>
3. Brown CM, Vostok J, Johnson H, Bruns M, Gharpure R, Sami S, et al. Outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 Infections, Including

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4. Illinois Department of Public Health. State of Illinois and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in P-12 Schools. (updated August 9, 2021). <http://dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/ISBE%20School%20FAQs%2008.09.21.pdf>
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