



December 3, 2021

Revised Updated Testing and Quarantine Supplemental Information
to the “Interim NYSDOH Guidance for Classroom Instruction in P-12 Schools
During the 2021-2022 Academic Year”

The purpose of this document is to provide Local Health Departments (LHDs) with clarification on the new information regarding testing and quarantine. Please note:

- LHDs are the entity responsible for deciding whether to adopt the practices in items I-III and they are under no obligation to do so.
- LHDs that choose to adopt these practices **must**:
 - Ensure that schools remain current on their reporting of all COVID-19 test results—including all results of home testing (if permitted)—to the New York State COVID-19 Report Card, in addition to their other reporting obligations under public health law;
 - Assess available local resources, especially related to testing availability and accessibility, prior to allowing the practice(s). NYSDOH may not be able to make additional resources (e.g., antigen test kits), beyond those which are currently available, available to LHDs in order to facilitate “Test to Stay” and “Testing out of Quarantine” as described below. **(Please note that testing related to the following practices is considered an allowable expense under ELC School Reopening Funding, however); AND**
 - Ensure the opportunity to participate is available to every school in the county. Adoption of the following practices I-III must be a county-level, not school-level, decision in order to guarantee consistency in local administration of quarantine and isolation review responsibilities under Public Health Law Article 21 and its related regulations. For example, LHDs may not permit a school that has access to independent funding for test kits to adopt “Test to Stay” while prohibiting another school with inadequate resources from doing so.
- Localities are encouraged to use existing Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) School Reopening funds to facilitate access to COVID-19 diagnostic testing, including antigen testing, to permit participation in school activities and prevent school absences after symptoms have resolved.
- The purpose of Items V-VI is to align the “Interim NYSDOH Guidance for Classroom Instruction in P-12 Schools During the 2021-2022 Academic Year” with updated CDC recommendations.

- This update provides new information on the type of tests that can be used to permit return to school after COVID symptoms and additional information related to over-the-counter tests (see Section II and new Section VIII).

NYSDOH will continue to provide updated information to LHDs throughout the school year.

I. “Test to Stay” (TTS)

Under current [NYSDOH schools guidance](#), unvaccinated close contacts of people with COVID-19 are excluded from school and quarantined. TTS is a strategy that has received media attention and is being piloted in certain jurisdictions. NYSDOH acknowledges TTS as a strategy that allows close contacts to avoid school exclusion (but not other restrictions of quarantine) by testing negative with a rapid NAAT or antigen test (e.g., BinaxNOW) on each school day for seven days after exposure. At this time, the NYSDOH does not recommend TTS. However, if LHDs choose to allow TTS to occur in schools within their jurisdiction, the LHD must ensure the following:

1. The school/district must have a written protocol that:
 - a) Considers equity (i.e., families should not have to pay for testing, or if they do, then the inability to pay should not prevent a student from being eligible for TTS),
 - b) Includes actions to follow-up on transmission (e.g., contact tracing) in the event that an individual tests positive, and
 - c) Other factors deemed essential or important by the LHD or school.
2. The daily test must be conducted and the results received before the school day begins, and positive individuals excluded/isolated per existing procedures.
3. If the test is done in an unmonitored setting (e.g., home), a mechanism must be in place to ensure that the test is done correctly and on the correct person.
4. The exposed person who is allowed to remain in school through TTS must be quarantined outside of school instruction/academic periods (on weekends/holidays when the seven-day TTS period is still active, but no school test is required; after school/evenings; no community activities or extracurricular participation including clubs, sports, arts/performance activities, etc.).
5. If the exposed person who is allowed to remain in school through TTS develops symptoms, they must be excluded from school per current school guidance.

NYSDOH will not provide new TTS technical assistance or resources for schools located in jurisdictions that permit the practice(s).

II. COVID-19 Testing of Vaccinated and Unvaccinated Persons to Permit School Participation After COVID-like Symptoms

Thus far during the 2021-2022 school year, NAAT tests were required to permit individuals to return to school after being excluded due to developing COVID-like symptoms. Understanding that the turnaround time for some laboratory-based NAATs has resulted in multiple-day exclusions from school for people with symptoms, **NYSDOH is amending its guidance to allow all such persons (i.e. those who develop COVID-19 symptoms and have no known exposure to someone with COVID-19) to participate in school activities following a negative NAAT or antigen test result, regardless of vaccination status.**

In addition to a negative NAAT or antigen test, symptomatic individuals must be well enough to participate in school, not have rhinorrhea (runny nose) or cough severe enough to make mask wear difficult or unhygienic, be fever-free for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication, and meet other school or district requirements to return to school after a non-COVID illness.

The following requirements remain in place:

1. There is no exemption to the antigen or NAAT testing requirement for symptomatic vaccinated people.
2. Individuals with symptoms that are attributable to pre-existing medical conditions (e.g., migraines, allergies) and are not new or worsening do not require school exclusion or testing.
3. If the healthcare provider makes a diagnosis of a confirmed non-COVID-19 acute illness (e.g. laboratory-confirmed influenza or strep-throat) AND COVID-19 is not suspected, then a note signed by the healthcare provider explaining the alternate diagnosis may be provided to allow a student, teacher, or staff member to participate in school without COVID-19 testing. Such individuals may participate in school according to the usual school and medical guidelines for the diagnosis.

LHDs are referred to the [recently-released algorithm](#) that addresses school attendance and requirements for children who have symptoms consistent with vaccine side effects shortly after receipt of the COVID vaccine. In many cases, those children may remain in school or return to school without testing. Please review the algorithm for details.

III. “Test Out of Quarantine”

NYSDOH has received questions as to whether it is acceptable to allow people under quarantine to shorten their quarantine by receiving negative COVID-19 test results. If LHDs choose to allow this practice in their jurisdiction, it must align with [CDC recommendations](#), which are currently as follows (emphasis added):

*When diagnostic testing resources are **sufficient and available**, then quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative and if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring. The specimen may be collected and tested within 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation (e.g., in*

anticipation of testing delays), but quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.

NYSDOH will not provide new “Test out of Quarantine” technical assistance or resources for schools located in jurisdictions who permit the practice(s).

IV. Exemption to weekly unvaccinated staff/teacher testing for recently recovered persons

NYSDOH has received questions as to whether school staff/teachers who were diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19 within the last 3 months were subject to the weekly testing requirement established in 10 NYCRR 2.62. They are not. Asymptomatic individuals exposed to COVID-19 who have been previously diagnosed with laboratory confirmed COVID-19, and have since recovered, are not required to retest and quarantine within 3 months after the date of symptom onset from the initial COVID-19 infection or date of first positive diagnostic test if asymptomatic during illness. Schools will have to keep track of when the three months is over, at which time the staff person should resume testing.

V. Mask Breaks in School

The [emergency regulations under 10 NYCRR 2.60](#) and the [Commissioner's Determination on Indoor Face Masking Pursuant to 10 NYCRR 2.60](#) do not include “mask breaks.” This is in accordance with CDC guidance recommending universal masking in schools to keep children in school and let them be closer together without risking close contact exposure and quarantines. Under these same regulations, local health officials are given the duty and accompanying discretion as to how the requirements will be enforced.

VI. Quarantine for Vaccinated People

Please note that, after the Department released the [INTERIM NYSDOH GUIDANCE FOR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN P-12 SCHOOLS DURING THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR](#), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its recommendations for what vaccinated people should do after being exposed to someone with COVID-19. Accordingly, consistent with CDC guidance, all “close contacts” with someone with COVID must quarantine unless they are fully vaccinated. People who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine after contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 unless they also present symptoms of possible infection; however, they should follow current CDC [recommendations](#) for what vaccinated people should do after exposure to COVID-19.

VII. Close Contact Exception Update

Since the beginning of the school year, the Department has applied the “close contact exception” to indoor school settings as defined by CDC. Please note that, after the

Department released the [INTERIM NYSDOH GUIDANCE FOR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN P-12 SCHOOLS DURING THE 2021-2022 SCHOOLY YEAR](#), the CDC updated this exception to include both indoor classroom settings and certain outdoor settings. The Department continues to align with CDC's updated exception. Specifically:

In the P-12 indoor classroom setting **or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with educator supervision)**, the CDC specifies that students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinically compatible illness](#)) where both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks are not considered close contacts. This exception to the close contact definition does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom or structured outdoor setting.

VIII. Use of Over-the-Counter Tests

The Department is aware that there are numerous [COVID-19 antigen tests that have received United States Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) Emergency Use Authorization \(EUA\)](#), including over-the-counter (OTC) tests authorized for home or self-testing. The Department does not prohibit the use of such OTC tests for school purposes; however, schools or LHDs are empowered to impose prohibitions, restrictions, or conditions on their use based on a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks. Schools must follow guidance issued by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which can be found [here](#), and guidance from LHDs with regard to use of OTC tests, including the possible imposition of stricter criteria for their use if allowed by the LHD. The benefits of using OTC tests may include improved convenience, rapid turnaround times, and reduced barriers. Drawbacks may include lack of reporting to public health, inability to confirm the negative result was on a specimen collected from the symptomatic individual, and lack of an official test result (e.g. no printed result that can be provided as proof of eligibility to participate in school, no medical supervision, and no doctor's note). If localities accept negative results from these OTC antigen tests for school purposes, they are responsible for determining what constitutes sufficient evidence of the negative result and advising the school community accordingly.