

K-12 Schools Guidance 2021-2022 Questions & Answers

8/6/2021

Related Materials

2021-2022 K-12 Schools Reopening Framework and Guidance

| CDPH Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings | Safe Schools for All Hub

Updated on August 6, 2021:

- To add a question on parental or self-attestation for mask exemptions.

VACCINATION

1. What are the benefits to being fully vaccinated for students in school?

COVID-19 vaccines are effective. They decrease the chances of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19. Getting vaccinated yourself may also protect people around you, particularly people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Fully vaccinated students may remain in school and avoid interruptions to in-person education, even if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19, so long as they remain without symptoms. Also, fully vaccinated students are not recommended to participate in screening testing at school.

MASKING

2. Why does the K-12 guidance require masks to be worn indoors?

Masks are one of the most effective and simplest safety mitigation layers to prevent in-school transmission of COVID-19. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is primarily transmitted via airborne particles. Masks limit the spread of the virus in the air from infected persons and protect others exposed to these particles.

Universal masking indoors in K-12 schools is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and by the CDC in its Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools (updated July 27, 2021). As the CDC noted: "CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Children should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with layered prevention strategies in place." 

Universal masking prevents outbreaks and permits modified quarantine under certain conditions in K-12 settings, supporting more instructional time and minimizing missed school days for students. Additionally, universal masking indoors is critical to enabling all schools to offer and provide full in-person instruction to all students without minimum physical distancing requirements at the outset of the school year.

As noted by the CDC, COVID-19 prevention strategies in K-12 schools are designed to protect people who are not fully vaccinated. Almost all K-6th graders are unvaccinated and will not be eligible for vaccines at the outset of the 2021-22 school year. Additionally, although some 7-12th grade students will be fully vaccinated by the start of the school year, many will not. As of July 22, 2021, less than 40% of Californians 12 to 17 years old were fully vaccinated.

Requiring universal masking indoors in K-12 schools also takes into account a number of other key considerations: operational barriers of tracking vaccination status in order to monitor and enforce mask wearing; the potential for increased transmission due to circulating variants; and potential detrimental effects on students of differential mask policies, which include: potential stigma, bullying, and isolation of vaccinated OR unvaccinated students, depending on the culture and attitudes in the school or surrounding community.

CDPH will continue to assess conditions on an ongoing basis, and will determine no later than November 1, 2021, whether to update mask requirements or recommendations. Indicators, conditions, and science review will include vaccination coverage status, in consideration of whether vaccines are available for children under 12, community case and hospitalization rates, outbreaks, and ongoing vaccine effectiveness against circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in alignment with the CDC-recommended indicators to guide K-12 school operations.

3. Is a doctor's note required to obtain a mask exemption? Is parental or self-attestation permitted to obtain a mask exemption?

As per CDPH Guidance on Face Coverings, "persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a mask" as well as "persons who are hearing impaired" are exempt from mask requirements.

Assessing for exemption due to a medical condition, mental health condition, disability that prevents wearing a mask, or hearing impairment is a medical determination and therefore must be made by a physician, nurse practitioner, or other licensed medical professional practicing under the license of a physician. Self-attestation and parental attestation for mask exemptions due to the aforementioned conditions do not constitute medical determinations.

Additionally, per CDPH K-12 Guidance, "persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition, must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it."

4. Do masks need to be worn on school buses?

Yes. CDPH Face Coverings Guidance requires that everyone (regardless of vaccination status) use masks on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems. In addition, CDC's Order requiring the wearing of masks by all people on public transportation conveyances also includes school buses. Passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions. More information regarding the CDC Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation is available on the CDC's website.



5. If students take a school trip off-campus to an indoor location, do vaccinated students need to wear a mask indoors if the location they are visiting does not require fully vaccinated people to wear masks?

If students are participating in a school event or being supervised by school staff, face mask guidance for K-12 settings must be followed regardless of location.

6. Why do vaccinated teachers need to wear a mask?

As noted by the CDC, COVID-19 prevention strategies in K-12 schools are designed to protect people who are not fully vaccinated. Many students will not be fully vaccinated by the start of the school year. Due to the potential for increased spread from highly transmissible circulating variants and that face masks remain one of the most effective and simplest safety mitigation layers, adults – including those who are fully vaccinated – in K-12 school settings are required to mask when sharing indoor spaces with students. Universal indoor masking of teachers, regardless of vaccination status, is also recommended by the CDC.

CDPH will continue to assess conditions on an ongoing basis, and will determine no later than November 1, 2021, whether to update mask requirements or recommendations. Indicators, conditions, and science review will include vaccination coverage status, in consideration of whether vaccines are available for children under 12, community case and hospitalization rates, outbreaks, and ongoing vaccine effectiveness against circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in alignment with the CDC-recommended indicators to guide K-12 school operations.

QUARANTINE

7. Why does the guidance permit students with known exposures to COVID-19 to remain in-school?

Scientific research and experience from around the country demonstrate that when both parties are wearing facemasks appropriately at the time of a school-based exposure to COVID-19, in-school transmission is unlikely and students can safely continue in-person learning. When students remain in school after exposure because the student and the individual with COVID-19 were wearing masks appropriately, this is called modified quarantine. Modified quarantine involves a period of time during which students may continue in-person instruction but should refrain from all extracurricular activities at school, including sports, and activities within the community setting. Testing during modified quarantine provides an additional layer of safety and monitoring. Modified quarantine allows for less missed days of school and supports in-person education.

8. Who qualifies for modified quarantine?

Asymptomatic unvaccinated students exposed to COVID-19 may qualify for a modified quarantine, provided they meet criteria listed in the K-12 Guidance.

The infected person to whom the asymptomatic unvaccinated student was exposed may be any individual in the school setting, including fellow students, teachers, or other school-based contacts. The exposure may have occurred in any school setting in which students are supervised by school staff. This includes indoor or outdoor



school settings and school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems.

Note: Fully vaccinated students exposed to COVID-19 may refrain from quarantine following a known exposure if asymptomatic, per CDPH Fully vaccinated People Recommendations.

9. What are students permitted to do during modified quarantine?

When students are attending school during modified quarantine, they continue to be required to wear masks indoors and are strongly encouraged to wear masks outdoors. They may use school buses, including buses operated by public and private school systems. They may participate in all required instructional components of the school day, except activities where a mask cannot be worn, such as while playing certain musical instruments. However, students on modified quarantine may eat meals on campus using food service recommendations provided in the K-12 Guidance. As noted above, they should refrain from all extracurricular activities, including sports.

10. What should be the timing for twice weekly testing of students undergoing a modified quarantine? When can students on modified quarantine resume all activities?

In general, it is recommended to test immediately after being exposed to someone with COVID-19. Subsequent testing should occur at least 3 days apart. As per Item 9 in the K-12 Guidance, quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen is collected after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.

11. What type of test may be used to assess a person's status during quarantine or to exit quarantine?

If a person is asymptomatic during quarantine, any FDA-approved diagnostic test is acceptable for evaluation of an individual's COVID-19 status, as noted in the CDPH testing guidance. This includes antigen diagnostic tests and PCR diagnostic tests. PCR tests are preferred, but not required. For more information about test types, see the CDPH school testing resources.

Collection of diagnostic specimens for asymptomatic persons during quarantine may occur in schools, healthcare settings, or other locations supervised by school or healthcare personnel. Specimens may be processed at the point-of-care (POC) or in a laboratory.

At this time, at-home testing is not recommended for evaluation of an individual's status during quarantine. CDPH is currently conducting pilot studies to further understand the utility of at-home testing.

For persons in quarantine who experience symptoms, a negative result from an antigen test or POC molecular test results should be confirmed with a laboratory-based PCR test.

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