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K-12 COVID-19 Guidance from the Wyoming Department of Health

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The Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) recommends that Wyoming K-12 schools follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help prevent transmission of COVID-19 in the school setting. This guidance document summarizes specific recommendations from the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) related to new CDC guidance on masking, contact tracing, and testing that were released in late February/early March, 2022. Complete CDC recommendations can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.

COVID-19 COMMUNITY LEVELS AND MASKING

CDC has updated the metrics they use to measure the impact of COVID-19 on communities. The new metrics focus on transmission levels, severe illness, and hospital capacity, rather than transmission levels alone. These metrics are measured weekly at the county level and group counties into Low, Medium, and High risk categories. CDC and WDH no longer recommend universal masking, including in K-12 schools, in counties that are in Low or Medium risk categories. Universal masking is still recommended in K-12 schools in counties that are in the High risk category.

At all community levels, individuals may choose to continue to wear masks to protect themselves, especially if they are at higher risk for severe illness. Because mask use in this context is to protect the individual wearing the mask rather than to protect others, these individuals should wear the highest quality mask that they can wear consistently and comfortably; respirator masks such as KN95s or N95s provide the highest level of protection. WDH recommends that K-12 schools continue to support mask use among individuals who may choose to wear them.

The CDC also recommends mask use during school-related transportation be consistent with mask policies within the school as a whole based on COVID-19 Community Levels. Effective February 25, 2022, CDC is exercising its enforcement discretion to **not** require that people wear masks on buses or vans operated by public or private school systems, including early care and education/child care programs. Further details can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>

Mask use to protect others also continues to be recommended among individuals who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and who return to school after 5 days of isolation and among individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Community Levels by county as well as recommendations for communities, including K-12 schools, at each level can be found here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>

ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE

Isolation (staying home when sick) and quarantine (staying home after being exposed) are still recommended for all individuals, including in K-12 settings.

Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19

Staff or students who have tested positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should remain home from school until they meet all of the following criteria:

- The individual has not had a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medication) for at least 24 hours;
- Other symptoms are improving;
- It has been at least 5 days since symptoms first started.

If the individual did not have symptoms, he or she should stay home from school until 5 days have passed since the positive test was collected.

Individuals with a positive test are recommended to continue to wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days after returning to school other than when eating, drinking, sleeping, or participating in artistic or athletic activities that cannot be done while wearing a mask. When not wearing a mask, distancing of 6 feet should be maintained to the extent possible.

To calculate the length of time an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 should stay home from school, add 5 days to the date that symptoms started (or the date the positive test was collected if there are no symptoms). For example, if symptoms started on October 1, the individual should stay home through October 6 and can return to school on October 7 if he or she meets the criteria above. Masking is recommended to continue through day 10 (October 11).

Close Contacts of Infectious Individuals

Individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 are infectious beginning 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms and until they meet the criteria to return to school. If an individual does not have symptoms, they are infectious beginning 48 hours prior to the test collection.

An individual is considered a close contact if they were within 6 feet of the infectious individual for 15 minutes or more during the course of a 24-hour period.

There are several circumstances in which an individual with an exposure to an infectious individual **is not recommended** to stay home from school. These individuals are recommended to wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure other than when eating, drinking, sleeping, or participating in artistic or athletic activities that cannot be done while wearing a mask. When not wearing a mask, distancing of 6 feet should be maintained to the extent possible. WDH recommends they also be tested on day 5 after the exposure, if possible, with the exception of persons who have tested positive within the past 90 days who should not be tested.

- Both the infectious individual and the person exposed were wearing masks at the time of exposure.
- The person exposed is 18 years or older and has received all recommended doses of COVID-19 vaccine (including a booster dose if eligible based on the timing of the primary series) or the person exposed is less than 18 years of age and has completed a primary series of COVID-19 vaccine
 - Individuals 18 years of age and older who have completed a primary series of Pfizer or Moderna within the prior 5 months or a primary series of Janssen within the prior two months do not need to stay home from school because they are not yet eligible for a booster dose
 - Because booster doses have been made available relatively recently for individuals younger than 18 years, these individuals do not need to stay home if they have completed a primary series regardless of booster status. WDH encourages booster doses for individuals aged 12 years and older if at least 5 months have passed since completion of the primary series
- The person exposed tested positive for COVID-19 using a molecular or antigen test performed by a provider or laboratory during the three months prior to exposure.

All other individuals identified as close contacts are recommended to stay home from school until the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to others is reduced. Close contacts are recommended to stay home from school for 5 days after the exposure. After returning to school, they are recommended to continue to wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days other than when eating, drinking, sleeping, or participating in artistic or athletic activities that cannot be done while wearing a mask. When not wearing a mask, distancing of 6 feet should be maintained to the extent possible. Close contacts are recommended to test on day 5 after the exposure if possible.

WDH recommends a test-to-stay program as an alternative to staying home from school. Please see the test-to-stay guidance on this page for further information:
<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>

To calculate the length of time an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 is recommended to stay home from school, add 5 days to the date of the exposure. For example, if the exposure occurred on October 1, the individual must stay home through October 6 and can return to school on October 7. Testing is recommended on day 5 (October 6). Masking is recommended through day 10 (October 11).

Any close contacts who develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 should follow the recommendations for individuals who test positive above.

There are certain circumstances in which it can be difficult to determine precisely whether there are exposures within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes, such as during athletic competitions. Local public health offices and WDH are available to consult in such situations as necessary. WDH may recommend symptom monitoring rather than exclusion from school in such situations. In general, entire classrooms or teams do not need to stay home unless it is likely that the infectious person had close contact with the entire classroom or team.

Guidance for Implementing Isolation and Quarantine in Schools

The CDC no longer recommends universal contact tracing for COVID-19, and instead recommends prioritizing high risk congregate settings such as long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, outbreaks and clusters of related cases, and the emergence of new variants. WDH is no longer attempting to reach individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 unless they are part of one of these settings, and is no longer routinely issuing isolation and quarantine orders for COVID-19.

Based on these new CDC guidelines, WDH is expanding recommendations and providing additional options for how K-12 schools can implement quarantine as measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Either of the following options may be effective:

- K-12 schools may continue to conduct contact tracing as previously recommended and require that close contacts mask or stay home depending on vaccination status. WDH recommends a test-to-stay program as an alternative to staying home, if available: <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>
- K-12 schools can notify parents of an exposure related to an infectious case of COVID-19 in the school setting, whether academic or extracurricular. If possible, notifications should be to close contacts who would be recommended to mask or quarantine as defined above. When identification of specific close contacts is not possible because of resource constraints, such as at High levels of transmission, notification should be made to any group with potential exposure, such as a classroom or a team. **With this option, the decision whether to stay at home should be made by the parents.** WDH recommends that students who were exposed and continue to come to school wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure.

Regardless of the option chosen above, WDH continues to recommend that all K-12 schools implement the following precautions:

- K-12 schools should continue to ensure that individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 remain home from school according to CDC's isolation guidelines.
- Students with household contact to COVID-19 are recommended to continue to follow CDC's recommendations for quarantine and/or mask use, depending on vaccination status. WDH recommends a test-to-stay program as an alternative to quarantine.

- Staff members should follow CDC’s recommendations for quarantine and/or mask use after an exposure, depending on vaccination status.
- K-12 schools should notify local public health officials or WDH regarding any clusters or outbreaks of COVID-19 (2 or more cases of COVID-19 likely resulting from transmission in a K-12 setting, whether academic or extracurricular). Public health officials can then provide mitigation recommendations specific to the situation. WDH can be notified by emailing wdh.covid19@wyo.gov or calling 1-877-996-9000.
- At minimum, notification should be made to parents regarding potential exposure to COVID-19 at school so that they can make informed decisions about returning to school based on their students’ health status.

TESTING

WDH will continue to make rapid and laboratory-based testing resources available to K-12 schools through the 2021-2022 school year. Schools may use these resources to provide diagnostic testing for individuals with symptoms of COVID-19, testing for those who have been exposed to COVID-19, testing as part of a test-to-stay program as an alternative to staying home after an exposure, and screening testing of asymptomatic staff or students to help identify infections early. While screening testing can be performed at all COVID-19 Community Levels, new CDC guidance indicates it is likely most useful at Medium and High levels.

OTHER COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

With a reduction in prevention measures such as masking and contact tracing, the role of other systematic prevention measures in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses in schools become more important. Examples of these measures include educating families about and reducing barriers to COVID-19 and routine childhood vaccinations, physical distancing, improving ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, and staying home when sick. WDH recommends that schools continue to implement these measures and expand them where possible. Detailed recommendations can be found from the CDC:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional guidance documents and contact information can be found here:

<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>