

CONTACT TRACING, ISOLATION & QUARANTINE

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released guidance and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) issued a handbook on February 12, 2021, to help communities return to safe in-person learning in K-12 schools. This document highlights the CDC's key measures "essential to safe delivery of in-person instruction," which includes "contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the health department."



IDENTIFY AND ISOLATE COVID-19 CASES AND NOTIFY CONTACTS.*

The CDC guidance states that all schools should encourage students and staff with symptoms of COVID-19 (temperature of 100.4 or more, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing, diarrhea or vomiting, new severe headache, or new loss of taste or smell) to stay home and refer them for diagnostic testing. Close contacts—anyone who was within six feet of an infected person for a total of at least 15 minutes within a 24-hour period, even if masks were worn—should also stay home and get tested. Those with positive tests should [isolate](#), and close contacts should quarantine by following CDC-recommended [quarantine](#) protocols.

CDC advises that schools should collaborate with local health departments and, to the extent allowed by privacy laws, confidentially report student and staff infections and notify those who may have been exposed to an infected person. In addition to identifying close contacts, schools should consider notifying and extending testing referrals to others who may have had contact, such as individuals who shared a classroom or bus but were always more than six feet away as well as students and staff who share a hallway.



FACILITATE CONTACT TRACING.*

Both CDC and ED recommend close collaboration between schools and local public health officials to support contact tracing to identify close contacts who should then be referred for diagnostic testing and required to quarantine. The ED Handbook notes that practices such as cohorting and assigning students to the same bus seat every day can help facilitate contact tracing since these practices make it easier to identify which students were in close contact with an infected person.



ALLOW FLEXIBLE LEAVE FOR STAFF WHO ARE SICK OR HAVE BEEN EXPOSED.*

CDC notes that schools should have flexible sick leave policies and practices and encourages policies that allow staff who are sick or who have been exposed to COVID-19 to stay home and away from coworkers and students without punishment. Such policies should also account for employees who need to take care of sick family members and children whose schools or daycares are closed or who live with high-risk family members.



SCREENING TESTING TO REDUCE THE SILENT SPREAD OF COVID-19.*

CDC recommends that schools consider [voluntary screening testing](#) of students and staff without symptoms in order to identify cases and prevent secondary transmission in schools. The CDC guidance provides detailed advice on how schools may utilize screening testing, either on school premises or in collaboration with a community service or health department. According to CDC, the ability of schools to provide safe in-person education, particularly in middle and high schools, when COVID-19 transmission is high may depend on whether screening testing is taking place.

For more information, review the [CDC guidance](#) and [ED Handbook](#).

HOW TO CREATE SAFE, JUST & HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Ensuring our school communities are safe, just, and healthy places to learn not only protects us from the spread of COVID-19 but also helps us improve school conditions so that our students, educators, and staff—whether Black, brown, or white, Native or newcomer—can thrive. Together, we can advocate for the schools our students, educators, and communities deserve.

Every child—regardless of race or place—deserves a safe and welcoming school where they can thrive. But for too long, certain politicians have deprived public schools the resources they need to reach and teach every child, as they've denied our families tests and treatment during the pandemic. Policymakers must prioritize communities that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic and provide resources for screening testing, diagnostic testing, and medical care.

NEA MEMBERS: ACT NOW

Coordinate with your local association to ensure collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are followed or revisions are negotiated, as needed, to address how COVID-19 cases will be identified and contact tracing facilitated, including notice to staff and parents/guardians, isolation and quarantine protocols, privacy protections, and leave policies for illness and quarantine.

If you are not covered by a CBA, **seek opportunities to work with school administrators** to ensure steps outlined here are adopted. In either case, make sure that educators are included in the development, implementation, and review of COVID-19 responses.

Reach out to policymakers and demand that health departments have the necessary resources to conduct effective contact tracing.

Contact your state-elected officials and district leaders and demand that they ensure your school receives the necessary funding for health and safety materials.

Share this guidance with your fellow educators and school leaders.