

# Staff Information: COVID 19

While the COVID-19 pandemic remains an evolving situation, A+ Charter Schools, Inc. has developed an overview of prevention and mitigation strategies that will play a key role in safely opening schools for in person learning for the 2021-2022 school year.

## ***Masks and Vaccinations:***

A+ Charter Schools, Inc. recommend all school personnel, students, parents, and volunteers to wear a mask and encourage vaccination.

**Transportation & Masks:** If your school system offers transportation, please note that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) has issued an order requiring masks on school buses. Under the order, passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems. The order excludes children younger than 2 years old, a person with a disability who cannot wear a mask (or safely wear a mask) because of the disability, and a person for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty. The order also does not require a driver to wear a mask if they are the only person on the bus.

**Best Practices for K-12 Schools:** There remain many prevention and mitigation strategies available to schools. For instance, the CDC has issued Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools, which describes best practices for schools. The guidance acknowledges that a return to in-person instruction must be prioritized and sets forth strategies for minimizing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the school setting. The CDC guidelines are not binding or legally mandated, but should be implemented to the extent they are (1) feasible; and (2) not in conflict with binding state law. The prevention strategies recommended by the CDC include:

- Promoting [optional] vaccination: While Texas public schools cannot mandate that employees or eligible students obtain a COVID-19 vaccine, school leaders can implement CDC strategies to promote the vaccine, including providing information on vaccination locations, partnering with local health authorities to facilitate vaccination, and generally encouraging vaccination.
- [Optional] Consistent and correct mask use: Texas public schools may not mandate face masks for employees, students, or visitors, but school leaders are free to promote and encourage voluntary masking, including leading by example by wearing a mask.
- Physical distancing: The CDC recommends schools maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms.
- Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks: Screening testing identifies infected people, including those with or without symptoms (or before development of symptoms) who may be contagious, so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission.
- Ventilation: The CDC recommends strategies for bringing fresh air into indoor spaces to reduce virus particles in the air, including by opening multiple doors and windows, using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.

- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette: The CDC recommends teaching, monitoring, and reinforcing frequent handwashing with proper techniques (with soap and water for at least 20 seconds) and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes). Hand sanitizer should be used where handwashing is not possible.
- Staying home when sick and getting tested: Students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as influenza (flu) or COVID-19, should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care, regardless of vaccination status. Students must be excluded from school until they meet applicable conditions for re-entry.
- Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine: The CDC recommends that schools continue to collaborate with state and local health departments, to the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws, to confidentially provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID19. Close contacts should be excluded in accordance with TEA guidance.
- Cleaning and disinfection: The CDC recommends cleaning once a day using disinfectants on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency COVID-19 list.<sup>13</sup>

***If someone with a test-confirmed case of COVID-19 has been in a school, the school must follow reporting requirements:***

1. If an individual who has been in a school is test-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must notify its local health department, in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, including confidentiality requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
2. Upon receipt of information that any teacher, staff member, student, or visitor at a school is test-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must submit a report to the Texas Department of State Health Services via an online form. The report must be submitted each Monday for the prior seven days (Monday-Sunday).

To help mitigate the risk of asymptomatic individuals being on campuses, school systems may provide and/or conduct recurring COVID-19 testing using rapid tests provided by the state or other sources. Testing can be conducted with staff and testing can also be conducted with students with prior written permission of parents.

**Close Contacts**: The TEA has stated that close contact determinations are based on guidance outlined by the CDC. A close contact generally means someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. A close contact does not include:

- a person who is fully vaccinated;
- a person who was previously diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last three months; or
- a student who was within three to six feet of an infected student in a K-12 indoor classroom setting if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. Schools are not required to conduct COVID-19 contact tracing, but if a school is made aware that a student is a close contact, the school system should notify the student's parents. According

to TEA guidance, parents of students who are determined to be close contacts of an individual with COVID-19 may opt to keep their students at home during the recommended stay-at-home period. The quarantine guidance for close contacts is that they may return to school once 10 days have passed since exposure if no symptoms are present, even without testing. The TEA provided that alternatively, close contacts can end the stay-at-home period if they receive a negative result from a PCR acute infection test after the close contact exposure ends. During the stay-at-home period, the school system may deliver remote instruction consistent with the practice of remote conferencing outlined in the proposed updates to SAAH rules.

The EEOC has stated that employers may ask all employees who will be physically entering the workplace if they have COVID-19 or symptoms associated with COVID-19, and ask if they have been tested for COVID-19. The EEOC has also stated that because the CDC and state/local health authorities have acknowledged community spread of COVID-19 and issued attendant precautions, employers may measure employees' body temperature.

**If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, can they be required to stay home from work?** Yes, an employer may exclude an employee with COVID-19 from the workplace because their presence would pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others. For employees with symptoms, CDC guidelines currently allow return to work around others after:

- 10 days since symptoms first appeared and
- 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving (Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation) If the employee tested positive but had no symptoms, they can return to work after 10 days have passed since they had a positive viral test for COVID-19.

**If an employee exhibits symptoms of COVID-19, can they be sent home from work?** Yes, an employer may exclude an employee with symptoms associated with COVID-19 from the workplace because their presence would pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others. The CDC currently identifies the following symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache • New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting

- Diarrhea If an employee displays symptoms when they arrive at work or become sick during the day, they should be immediately separated from students, other staff, and visitors and sent home. The CDC has not established clear guidelines for a test-based return to work policy for employees who had symptoms associated with COVID-19 but obtained a negative test. If an employee is sent home for COVID-19 symptoms and subsequently obtains a negative test result, you may follow standard employee illness protocols for returning to work (e.g. 24 hours fever free or as approved for work by a doctor). A doctor's note or medical documentation may be required if required under the policy. If an employee is sent home for COVID-19 symptoms and does not obtain a COVID-19 test, the return to work criteria would be the same as for lab-confirmed COVID-19.<sup>47</sup> Such an employee may return to work:

- 10 days since symptoms first appeared and
- 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving (Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation).