

Austin Public Health

Frequently Asked Questions on Reopening Austin-Travis County Schools



This document includes questions about COVID-19 asked by schools during meetings and questions that have been emailed to Austin Public Health at APHSchoolInfo@austintexas.gov. Austin Public Health will update this document on a regular basis.

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A. Cleaning and Disinfection

NEW
9/24/2020

1. **The disinfectant we use must sit for 10 minutes before being wiped away, which is too long for teachers to use to disinfect tables between classes. What recommendations do other schools have for a disinfectant that works well and more quickly?**

The CDC's [Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#), the CDC outlines this general framework for cleaning and disinfection practices:

1. Normal routine cleaning with soap and water will decrease how much of the virus is on surfaces and objects, which reduces the risk of exposure.
2. Disinfection using [EPA-approved disinfectants](#) against COVID-19 can also help reduce the risk. Frequent disinfection of surfaces and objects touched by multiple people is important.
3. When [EPA-approved disinfectants](#) are not available, alternative disinfectants can be used (for example, 1/3 cup of bleach added to 1 gallon of water, or 70% alcohol solutions). Do not mix bleach or other cleaning and disinfection products together--this can cause fumes that may be very dangerous to breathe in. Keep all disinfectants out of the reach of children.

The City of San Francisco has a [list of cleaning products and disinfectants](#) that considers toxicity and lets you arrange by dwell time.



B. Close Contacts, Quarantine, & Isolation

1. **I am caring for my child who tested positive for COVID-19. Do I still have to quarantine?**

[Yes, you still have to quarantine](#) because you would be considered a close contact of your child. Your 14-day quarantine would start after the 10-day isolation period for your child ends. If you have to care for another member of your family who tests positive for COVID-19, your 14-day quarantine would need to restart after the 10-day isolation periods for that family member ends.

2. If a student is sent home from on-campus learning for self-quarantine, can that student attend before and after school-sponsored activities, such as athletic practices, rehearsals, and clubs?

No, the student should stay home for 14 days after their last contact with a person who was diagnosed with COVID-19. Children should not go to school or to child care in person. They should also not go to sports practices, games, lessons, or other activities.

Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their state or local health department. Anyone who has had close contact with someone with COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days after their last exposure to that person. See [CDC Quarantine Guidance](#)

3. I was around someone who has COVID-19, and my COVID-19 test came back negative. Do I still need to quarantine for 14 days after I was last exposed?

Yes. You should still self-quarantine for 14 days since your last exposure. It can take up to 14 days after exposure to the virus for a person to develop COVID-19 symptoms. A negative result before end of the 14-day quarantine period does not rule out possible infection. By self-quarantining for 14 days, you lower the chance of possibly exposing others to COVID-19. See [CDC Guidance: If You or Someone You Know is Sick or Had Contact with Someone who Has COVID-19](#)

4. I was around someone who has COVID-19, but I feel fine. Why should I stay home?

People with COVID-19 can still spread the virus even if they don't have any symptoms. If you were around someone who had COVID-19, it is critical that you stay home and away from others for 14 days from the last day that you were around that person. Staying home and away from others at all times helps your health department in the fight against COVID-19 and helps protect you, your family, and your community.

5. What should I do if I was around someone who was identified as a close contact?

If you have been around someone who was identified as a [close contact](#) to a person with COVID-19, closely monitor yourself for any [symptoms of COVID-19](#). You do not need to self-quarantine unless you develop symptoms or if the person identified as a close contact develops COVID-19. You will need to begin a 14-day quarantine if you develop symptoms of COVID-19 or if the person identified as a close contact develops COVID-19.

6. Are the level of community transmission or the stage of risk we are in as a community taken into account when determining who is a close contact?

No, these factors are not taken into account when identifying close contacts. To identify who needs to quarantine, schools should follow the CDC definition of close contacts- any persons who were within 6 feet of a COVID-19 infected person for at least 15 minutes, during the 48 hours before the person began feeling sick until the sick person began isolation.

NEW
9/24/2020

- 7. We are using a cohort approach with masks and physical distancing at all times in class. For context, we also have HEPA13 purifiers in all rooms. If one case is identified in the cohort, is it required to quarantine the entire cohort?**

NEW
9/24/2020

If one of the cohort members tests positive, and that person was present in the cohort during the person's infectious period (the 48 hours before the person began feeling sick until the person began isolation), anyone who was within 6 feet of that person for at least 15 minutes would be considered a close contact and would need to quarantine. While face coverings and air purifiers are measures that can help mitigate spread of COVID-19, these factors should not be taken into account when identifying close contacts of infected persons.

- 8. Should people returning from trips quarantine for 14 days before returning to school in person?**

NEW
9/24/2020

As of 9/23/2020, Austin Public Health does not recommend quarantine for individuals returning from travel. Per the CDC's [web page on travel](#):

"You may have been exposed to COVID-19 on your travels. You may feel well and not have any symptoms, but you can be contagious without symptoms and spread the virus to others. You and your travel companions (including [children](#)) pose a risk to your family, friends, and community for 14 days after you were exposed to the virus. Regardless of where you traveled or what you did during your trip, take these actions to protect others from getting sick after you return:

- When around others, [stay at least 6 feet](#) (about 2 arms' length) from other people who are not from your household. It is important to do this everywhere, both indoors and outdoors.
- Wear a [mask](#) to keep your nose and mouth covered when you are outside of your home.
- [Wash your hands](#) often or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Watch your health and look for [symptoms of COVID-19](#). Take your temperature if you feel sick.

Follow [state, territorial, tribal](#) and local recommendations or requirements after travel."

C. COVID-19 Testing

- 1. Where are the COVID-19 testing sites in the community?**

NEW
9/24/2020

Testing sites throughout the community can be found here: <https://arcg.is/PzPza>

- 2. Do you have to have symptoms to be eligible for a test at an APH site?**

NEW
9/24/2020

Currently, you do not need to be symptomatic to get a test. Visit this web site, <http://austintexas.gov/covid-testinfo>, for more information.

The [Enrollment Form](#) allows anyone to complete an online assessment for COVID-19 testing. The enrollment, referral and testing through APH are FREE, and you will never be asked about your immigration status. Those with insurance are encouraged to contact their physician's office or insurer directly for testing referrals and private options. There are additional free testing services through APH partner CommUnityCare.

After scheduling a test, you will receive a confirmation via email or phone call that gives you information on your testing site and your appointment date and time.

3. How long does it take to get test results back from tests at APH testing sites?

NEW
9/24/2020

With increased lab capacity test results are currently (9/18/2020) available within 2-3 business days.



D. Face Coverings

1. Are vented face coverings acceptable?

No, the CDC does not recommend using masks with valves or vents. Masks with one-way valves or vents allow air to be exhaled through a hole in the material, which can result in expelled respiratory droplets that can reach others. This type of mask does not prevent the person wearing the mask from transmitting COVID-19 to others. [See CDC Face Covering Guidance](#)

2. Should face coverings be removed when sleeping?

Yes, face coverings should be removed when sleeping. Medline [defines sleeping](#) as a state of unconsciousness. Therefore, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious should not be wearing a mask. See page 14 of the [Austin Public Health Interim Guidance on Reopening for Austin-Travis County Schools](#).

3. Is there a list of diagnosis where a student shouldn't wear a mask?

Face coverings are not required for people who have a medical or behavioral condition or disability and cannot wear a face covering (including, but not limited to, any person who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious or incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to put on or remove the face covering without assistance).

APH Interim Guidance on Reopening for Austin-Travis County Schools does not include a list of diagnoses that preclude people from wearing masks. However, if staff or parents have questions as to whether an individual's medical or behavioral condition or disability prevents them from wearing a face covering, they are encouraged to consult with their healthcare provider.

4. Has there been any documented spread from persons wearing face shields? Although face shields are not recommended by the CDC, for students who cannot wear a cloth mask, we are allowing face shields.

NEW
9/24/2020

At this time we are not aware of documented spread from persons wearing face shields. As noted on page 16 of the [Austin Public Health Interim Guidance on Reopening for Austin-Travis County Schools](#), although the CDC does not recommend that face shields be used for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings, individuals who cannot wear a cloth face covering may consider wearing a face shield.

E. Medical Treatments

1. How should we handle nebulizer treatments at the school?

Schools should refer to CDC guidance when developing illness management policies.

[Per the CDC](#), Schools should obtain the appropriate [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) for staff who administer nebulizer treatments and peak flow meters to students with asthma. According to the CDC, PPE for use when administering nebulizer treatments or peak flow meters to students with asthma consists of gloves, medical or surgical facemask, and eye protection. School staff should be trained on when to use PPE, what PPE is necessary, where this PPE is stored, how to properly don (put on), use, and doff (take off) PPE, and how to properly dispose of used PPE. Staff should also be trained on how to administer nebulizer treatments and peak flow meters.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, if a nebulizer treatment or use of peak flow meter is necessary at school for a student, the number of people present in the room should be limited to the student and the staff member administering the treatment or peak flow meter. After the nebulizer treatment or use of peak flow meter, this room should undergo [routine cleaning and disinfection](#).



F. Reporting

1. Do schools only need to report cases of COVID-19 weekly? Should schools report to Austin Public Health online or by phone?

NEW
9/24/2020

Austin Public Health has created an online form for schools to use to submit self-reported COVID-19 cases. If your school system is not connected to the online form, please email APHSchoolInfo@austintexas.gov to give us the name, email, and phone number of the person who will be responsible for reporting cases to Austin Public Health. Please note, if you already sent APH your COVID-19 point-of-contact information, APH will be reaching out to that person soon about the reporting form.

Schools already connected with the Austin Public Health online form only need to report cases once a week, no later than 11 a.m. on Mondays for any self-reported cases received by the school for the preceding week.

Schools that are not yet connected to the Austin Public Health online reporting form should call the Austin Public Health Nurse Line at 512-972-5560 daily to report COVID-19 cases.

2. Is the Austin Public Health online reporting form different than the one schools complete for the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Department of State Health Services?

NEW
9/24/2020

Yes, Austin Public Health has a separate reporting form. For information on the state's COVID-19 case reporting form, refer to this [FAQ from the Texas Education Agency](#). Note, only public and charters schools must use the state's reporting form.

3. What will I be asked when I call in to the Austin Public Health Nurse Line to report a COVID-19 case?

NEW
9/24/2020

Please note that the Nurse Line is answering a variety of calls (calls regarding child care programs and schools, individuals calling in to get test results, as well as other COVID-19 related calls). For this reason, it is helpful to state up front that you are calling from a school or school district to report a COVID-19 case.

When calling in to the APH Nurse Line to report a case, you will be asked the following information:

- School name, address and zip code
- District name
- Grade levels at the school
- Caller name, phone, email and relationship to/role at the school
- Number of confirmed cases among students
- Whether any cases are related to sports and conditioning or extracurricular activities
- Number of cases among staff
- Number of cases among other individuals
- Positive case test date
- Number of staff in close contact
- Number of students in close contact
- Date of last of contacts with confirmed case
- Number of areas needing to quarantine, or is entire school closed?

Please call in daily to report self-reported COVID-19 cases to Austin Public Health, even if you do not have answers to all the questions/fields above.

4. For whom do we need to report COVID-19 cases?

NEW
9/24/2020

Report to Austin Public Health COVID-19 cases among children and staff on campus for any reason (teaching, working, learning, sports or extracurricular activities, etc.). You should also report COVID-19 cases among employees who may not be assigned to a specific campus, but who have been on a campus. This includes district staff, contract workers, substitutes, visitors — anyone who has been on one of the school campuses and self-reported a positive COVID-19 diagnosis to that school.

Schools do not need to report COVID-19 cases for virtual learners who have not been on campus. However, if a student who is doing their learning virtually but has been on campus for another reason (sports, extracurricular activity, etc.) tests positive for COVID-19, that case should be reported to Austin Public Health.

Cases among district or school staff who have not been on a school campus do not need to be reported.

5. Do we need to report when a family member at home is diagnosed positive and the child has been on campus?

NEW
9/24/2020

Family members who test positive, i.e. parents, etc., for COVID-19 and have not been on campus do not need to be reported to Austin Public Health.



G. Screening

NEW
9/24/2020

1. **I noticed the APH guidelines for schools recommend screening for a temperature of 100.0 or higher, while the County and City orders recommend using a threshold of greater than 99.6 degrees. What is the reason for the difference in the thresholds?**

The City of Austin Health Authority has set the temperature threshold for employees of “essential infrastructure” at greater than 99.6 degrees. Child care programs in Texas were considered essential (and were therefore never ordered to close). Austin Public Health guidelines for open child care programs designate a temperature threshold of greater than 99.6 degrees.

The temperature threshold used by Austin Public Health in the Interim Guidelines for schools is set at 100.0 degrees or higher to align with TEA guidance and the Texas Administrative Code (Chapter 97, Communicable Diseases).



H. Transportation

1. **If an individual who rides a bus tests positive for COVID-19, do we have to quarantine all the students on the bus or only those who were within 6 feet of the COVID-19 positive individual? Do students still need to quarantine if the windows on the bus were open?**

Only people who are identified as “close contacts” of the COVID-19 positive person must quarantine. Schools should use the [CDC definition of close contacts](#) when identifying close contacts and determining who should quarantine. APH recommends that schools utilize assigned seating in all classrooms and school transportation (e.g. buses, vans) to facilitate the rapid identification of close contacts should the school become aware of a COVID-19 infected individual.

The CDC does not consider the availability of open windows in their definition of close contact. Therefore, anyone within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more should quarantine.

2. **How can children be safe as they walk and bike to school?**

NEW
9/24/2020

The Safe Routes to School program offers the following guidelines for protecting against the spread of COVID-19 while walking or biking to school:

- Avoid touching public surfaces and use your elbow when using call signals to cross the street.
- Practice physical distancing when walking or biking including when safely passing another person, group, and crossing guards.
- When biking or walking to school, wear a face covering when physical distancing is not possible and when traveling with people outside of your household (e.g. If you are traveling in a “walking school bus” or biking in a “bike train” with people outside of your household, a face covering will most likely be required for the entire route).

- Wash your hands:
 - Before leaving home,
 - When you arrive at school,
 - Often throughout the school day, and
 - Once you get home.

Schools can contact Sahiti Karempudi with Safe Routes to School for more information at sahiti.karempudi@austintexas.gov.