

October 6, 2020

Dear Physicians,

As you know, schools in Austin/Travis County have begun opening for in person learning the past few weeks. Through these opening weeks, we have been in close communication with the school districts, charter schools, and private and independent schools. One of the challenges that has developed is with return to school notes from physicians' offices. More detailed return to school documentation from physician's offices would help schools make the best decisions to keep their students and staff safe.

Schools are faced with the challenge of determining when people can safely return to school if they have or had COVID-like symptoms. There have also been questions about for whom they must identify close contacts and have them quarantine. Some of the notes that are provided to schools contain few details or simply provide a return to school date with no additional information. A couple of examples of situations that have presented challenges to schools are:

- Whether a person who tested negative for COVID-19 but was told to isolate was considered a presumptive positive based on clinical judgement, and therefore, the school should identify the person's close contacts and have them quarantine; and
- When to allow return to school for symptomatic persons who are given an alternative diagnosis but are not tested for COVID-19.

To help facilitate this communication, we are asking for your assistance with the following:

- The Texas Medical Association has developed a [COVID-19 Physician Return to School Letter for Students](#) (linked here and attached) as a resource for physicians. I encourage physicians to use either this resource from TMA or to provide students with similarly detailed documentation to share with schools.
- I also encourage you to test all patients presenting with COVID-like symptom(s) before providing documentation of an alternative diagnosis.

These steps will strengthen the connection between the schools and physicians so we can all work together to keep the community safe during this pandemic.

If you need to report COVID-19 cases or have questions, please call APH nurse line at 512/972-5560. I appreciate your continued dedication to ensure the health and safety of the Austin/Travis County community as we all respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Mark E. Escott, MD, MPH, FACEP, FAEMS, NRP
Interim Medical Director and Health Authority, City of Austin/Travis County
Physical address: 5202 E. Ben White, Suite 600, Austin, Texas 78741
E-mail: mark.escott@austintexas.gov





NOTICE TO PHYSICIANS

COVID-19 Return-to-School Letter for Students

This publication is intended for general informational purposes only. The information provided in this publication does not constitute legal or medical advice and does not ensure a successful outcome. This publication does not substitute for your own professional judgment or the judgment of other clinicians in your practice.

The Texas Medical Association (TMA) provides this information with the express understanding that 1) no attorney-client relationship exists, 2) neither TMA nor its attorneys are engaged in providing legal advice and 3) the information is of a general character. This is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney. Although TMA has attempted to present materials that are accurate and useful, some material may be outdated and TMA shall not be liable to anyone for any inaccuracy, error or omission, regardless of cause, or for any damages resulting therefrom. Any forms are only provided for the use of physicians in consultation with their attorneys.

COVID-19 PHYSICIAN LETTER FOR STUDENTS

Practice Name: _____ Phone: _____

Student Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Grade: _____

Date sent home or first day kept home from school: _____

This student has been evaluated by a physician due to symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or exposure to a person with COVID-19. The student's status and conditions for return to school are marked below. Return-to-school conditions are based on current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and are intended to complement school policy. Return-to-school conditions may change based on new guidelines, symptoms, exposures, or results. Parent/guardian has been instructed to notify the school and physician of changes to the student's symptoms, exposures, or results.

If testing is PENDING, the physician should complete the form only after results are available. Notify parent or guardian that student may not return while a test is pending and must quarantine at home until results are available.

Status (Check only ONE)	COVID-19 Testing ¹	Test Result	Is student symptomatic?	RETURN-TO-SCHOOL CONDITIONS
<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Student has had close contact² with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 and must quarantine for 14 days from the date of last contact unless a positive COVID test is noted below.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not performed	N/A	Yes, <i>but other source determined</i>	Student may return to school 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved, other symptoms have improved, and the other source of symptoms is resolved. <i>Other symptom source (optional):</i> _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not performed	N/A	Yes, source undetermined	Student may return to school 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved and other symptoms have improved, after a MINIMUM of 10 days from symptom onset.
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCR or Antigen	-	Yes, <i>but other source determined</i>	Student may return to school 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved, other symptoms have improved, and the other source of symptoms is resolved. <i>Other symptom source (optional):</i> _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCR	-	Yes, source undetermined	Student's constellation of symptoms is significant enough to be still considered at risk and may not return to school until 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved and other symptoms have improved for a MINIMUM of 10 days from symptom onset.
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCR	-	Yes, source undetermined	Student's negative test result indicates symptoms are unlikely to be due to COVID-19. Student may return to school 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved and other symptoms have improved.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Antigen	-	Yes, source undetermined	Student still considered at risk and may not return to school until 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved and other symptoms have improved, with a MINIMUM of 10 days from symptom onset.
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCR or Antigen	+	Yes, source is presumed COVID-19	Student must stay home until 24 hours after fever ³ has resolved and other symptoms have improved, with a MINIMUM of 10 days from symptom onset.
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCR or Antigen	+	No, student is asymptomatic	Student must stay home for 10 days from the date of the test. If symptoms develop, the student must THEN stay home until 24 hours after fever ³ resolves and other symptoms have improved, with a MINIMUM of 10 days from symptom onset.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other comments:			

Earliest date this student may return to school: _____ Today's date: _____

Physician name: _____ Parent or guardian name: _____

Physician signature: _____ Parent or guardian signature: _____

¹ Antibody testing cannot diagnose current COVID-19 infection and should not be used to determine conditions for a student's return to school.

² CDC defines close contact as the following:

- You were within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more (regardless if either person was wearing a mask).
- You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- You had direct physical contact with the person (hugging or kissing).
- You shared eating or drinking utensils.
- Someone sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you.

³ Fever is defined as $\geq 100^\circ\text{F}$. Fever is resolved if a student's temperature is below 100.0°F for 24 hours WITHOUT the use of medication. If fever was never present, all other guidelines must still be followed.