

Austin Public Health Quarantine and Isolation Guidance for Pre-K through 12th Grade Schools January 25, 2022

A note about masking:

CDC and Austin Public Health (APH) strongly recommend **universal indoor masking** by all students (ages 2 years and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.

The CDC recently released updated [guidance for schools on quarantine](#) and [isolation](#) which aligns with CDC's updated [guidance for the public](#) on quarantine and isolation. The following is APH guidance for schools on how to apply the CDC guidance in Austin-Travis County Schools.

I. ISOLATION

A. What is isolation?

[Isolation](#) is separating people who have COVID-19 or [symptoms of COVID-19](#) from those who are not infected or showing symptoms in order to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. People isolate when they show symptoms of COVID-19 or are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, even if they don't have [symptoms](#).

B. Who needs to isolate?

People who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or are showing symptoms of COVID-19 need to isolate regardless of vaccination status. More specifically,

- **People who have a [positive viral test](#) for COVID-19**, regardless of whether or not they have [symptoms](#).
- **People with [symptoms](#) of COVID-19**, including people who are awaiting test results or have not been tested. People with symptoms should isolate even if they do not know if they have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.

C. How long should STUDENTS in schools isolate?

NOTE: The Texas Department of State Health Services [Communicable Disease Chart for Schools and Child Care Centers](#) was last updated 7/30/2021 and lists a 10-day isolation period for COVID-19. As of 1/21/2022, that chart had not been updated to include [CDC updates on shorter isolation](#).

Per the Communicable Disease Chart for Schools and Child Care Centers, the isolation criteria is as follows for children:

- If symptomatic, exclude until at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset, and fever free*, and other symptoms have improved.

- Children who test positive for COVID-19 but do not have any symptoms must stay home until at least 10 days after the day they were tested.

*Fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever suppressing medications. Fever is a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit (37.8° Celsius) or higher.

D. How long should STAFF in schools isolate?

Staff in schools who test positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms, regardless of vaccination status, must isolate for at least 5 days.

Calculating Isolation

If you had COVID-19 and had symptoms, day 0 is your first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after your symptoms developed.

If you test positive for COVID-19 and never develop symptoms, day 0 is the day of your positive viral test (based on the date you were tested) and day 1 is the first full day after the specimen was collected for your positive test.

If you develop symptoms after testing positive, your 5-day isolation period should start over. Day 0 is your first day of symptoms. Follow the recommendations above for ending isolation for people who had COVID-19 and had symptoms.

- These individuals should continue to wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public for 5 additional days (day 6 through day 10) after the end of your 5-day isolation period.
 - **If the individual is unable or unwilling to wear a mask when around others, they should continue to isolate for a full 10 days.** APH advises staff to consider whether they will be able to distance themselves 6 feet from others while working when their mask must be removed on days 6-10, and to isolate for 10 days if this is not possible.
- **Adults in schools who had symptoms may end isolation after 5 full days** if they are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and their symptoms are improving.
- **Adults in schools who did NOT have symptoms may end isolation after at least 5 full days** after their positive test.
- **Those who were severely ill with COVID-19** should isolate for at least 10 days.
- If an individual has access to a test and wants to test, the best approach is to use an antigen test towards the end of the 5-day isolation period. Collect the test sample only if you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and your other symptoms have improved (loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation). If your test result is positive, you should continue to isolate until day

10. If your test result is negative, you can end isolation, but continue to wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others at home and in public until day 10.

II. CLOSE CONTACTS & QUARANTINE

A. General guidance on close contacts

Masking

Anyone identified as a close contact of a COVID-positive individual should wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others for 10 days from the date of their last close contact with someone with COVID-19 (the date of last close contact is considered day 0).

Schools should strive to ensure that there is a plan for people identified as close contacts to stay masked at all times indoors until 10 full days after their last close contact to someone with COVID-19. During times in the school day when students or staff members may typically remove masks indoors (such as during lunches, snacks, band practice, etc.), have a plan for them to adequately distance from others and ensure they wear their masks when not actively participating in these activities (such as when they are not actively eating).

Testing

- If they develop symptoms, they should [get tested](#) immediately and isolate until they receive their test results. If they test positive, follow [isolation](#) recommendations.

- If they do not develop symptoms, they should [get tested](#) at least 5 days after they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19. (Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) within the previous 90 days and subsequently recovered, do not need to test unless symptoms develop.)
 - If they test negative, they can leave home, but continue to wear a [well-fitting mask](#) when around others at home and in public until 10 days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19.
 - If they test positive, they should isolate for at least 5 days from the date of their positive test (if they do not have symptoms). If they do develop [COVID-19 symptoms](#), isolate for at least 5 days from the date their symptoms began (the date the symptoms started is day 0). Follow recommendations in the [isolation](#) section.
 - If they are unable to get a test 5 days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19, they can leave their home after day 5 if they have been without [COVID-19 symptoms](#) throughout the 5-day period. Wear a [well-fitting mask](#) for 10 days after the date of last close contact when around others at home and in public.

B. What is quarantine?

Quarantine is a strategy used to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, by keeping people who have been in [close contact](#) with someone with COVID-19 apart from others.

People **quarantine** when they have been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19, based on their vaccination and [booster](#) status or history of prior infection in the past 90 days.

C. Who does not need to quarantine?

If you came into close contact with someone with COVID-19 and you are in one of the following groups, you do not need to quarantine.

- You are [up to date](#) with your COVID-19 vaccines.
 - [Per CDC](#), to allow time for students to catch up with the latest recommendations and to minimize disruption to in-person learning, schools may consider forgoing quarantine for students ages 12-17 years who completed their primary vaccine series but have not yet received all eligible boosters.
- You had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days (meaning you tested positive using a [viral test](#)).

D. Who should quarantine?

If you come into close contact with someone with COVID-19, you should quarantine if you:

- Are not [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines,
- Are unvaccinated, or
- Have not had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days (meaning you tested positive using a [viral test](#)).

“Test to Stay” as an Alternative to Quarantine

Test to Stay (TTS) can be implemented by schools as an alternative to traditional quarantine at home by establishing testing protocols to perform at least two tests during the period between close contact notification/TTS enrollment and day 7 after exposure, with the last test occurring 5-7 days after last close contact with a person confirmed with COVID-19. For more information about TTS, visit [What You Should Know About COVID-19 Testing in Schools](#).

E. How long to quarantine

For those needing to quarantine, refer to the APH “How Long to Quarantine Flow Chart” for schools posted at <https://www.austintexas.gov/schools> for detailed guidance on length of quarantine.

Calculating Quarantine

The date of your exposure is considered day 0. **Day 1 is the first full day after your last contact with a person who has had COVID-19.** Stay home and away from other people during quarantine.

Individuals can end quarantine after:

- 5 days (return on day 6) and wear [well-fitting mask](#) on days 6-10 after exposure, only if they can and will mask consistently AND be 6 feet apart from others when mask must be removed (snacks, meals, naps)
- 10 days (return on day 11) if they cannot or will not mask consistently AND be 6 feet apart from others when mask must be removed (snacks, meals, naps)

Note, because **children who are under 2 years of age** cannot wear masks, these children should quarantine for a full 10 days from the date of last exposure.

APH advises the following regarding quarantine when consistent masking is difficult:

- Individuals returning from a 5-day quarantine period should be distanced 6 feet from others when masks must be removed (lunches, snacks) and when participating in activities in which masks cannot be worn, which could include, but may not be limited to, certain sports, musical instruments, and choir.
- Note, it will likely be very difficult for schools that are not requiring masks to ensure individuals returning from 5-day quarantine periods wear masks consistently. If a school cannot ensure that individuals returning from a 5-day quarantine period will mask consistently and distance from others when masks must be removed, the school should have individuals quarantine for 10 days.