

Austin Public Health Quarantine and Isolation Guidance for Pre-K through 12th Grade Schools August 2, 2022

This document contains Austin Public Health (APH) guidance for schools in Austin and Travis County on how to apply the guidance on the [CDC's COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation](#) web page.

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 people with COVID-19 isolate?

Students who test positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms, regardless of vaccination status, must stay home and isolate for at least 5 days, as required by the Texas Department of State Health Services (see the DSHS [Communicable Disease Chart for Schools and Child Care Centers](#)). This requirement aligns with the latest CDC [isolation](#) recommendations.

APH recommends that **teachers and staff** be required to follow the same isolation guidance and stay home to isolate for at least 5 days.

Individuals with COVID-19 should wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others at home and in public for a full 10 days, even if they end isolation earlier. **If the individual is unable or unwilling to wear a mask when around others, they should isolate for a full 10 days.**

Calculating Isolation

If you test positive for COVID-19 and have 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 do not have 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.

People who have COVID-19 and have symptoms

- Individuals with COVID-19 who have 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.
- Individuals who continue to have a fever or other symptoms that have not improved after 5 days of isolation should wait to end isolation until they are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and their symptoms are improving.
- Those who were very sick from COVID-19 or have a weakened immune system should isolate for at least 10 days and consult their doctor before ending isolation.
- 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 fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and 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 test result is positive, they should continue to isolate until day 10. If test result is negative, they can end isolation, but continue to wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others at home and in public until day 10.

People who tested positive for COVID-19 but have had no symptoms

- Individuals with COVID-19 who did NOT have symptoms may [end isolation at least 5 full days](#) after their positive test, if they continue to have no symptoms.
- If an individual develops symptoms after testing positive, their 5-day isolation period should start over, and they should follow criteria for ending isolation for people who had COVID-19 and had symptoms.
- 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. If test result is positive, they should continue

to isolate until day 10, or they could choose to test daily, and if they get a negative test result, they can end isolation. They should continue to wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others at home and in public until day 10.

People who are moderately or very sick from COVID-19 or have a weakened immune system

- Individuals who are moderately ill from COVID-19 (experiencing symptoms that affect the lungs like shortness of breath or difficulty breathing) should isolate for 10 days and follow all other isolation precautions.
- Individuals who are very sick from COVID-19 (those who were hospitalized or required intensive care or ventilation support) and people who have weakened immune systems may need to isolate at home longer. The CDC recommends that these individuals isolate for at least 10 and up to 20 days and consult with their healthcare provider about when they can be around others.

People who receive Paxlovid treatment and experience a rebound in symptoms or a new positive viral test after having tested negative

- Per [the CDC health advisory about COVID-19 rebound after Paxlovid treatment](#), individuals with recurrence of COVID-19 symptoms or a new positive viral test after having tested negative should restart isolation and isolate again for at least 5 days. They can end their re-isolation period after 5 full days if fever has resolved for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and symptoms are improving. The individual should wear a mask for a total of 10 days after rebound symptoms started.

II. CLOSE CONTACTS & QUARANTINE

A. General guidance on close contacts

Who is a close contact in the school setting?

The general CDC definition of a close contact is someone who was less than 6 feet away from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. For example, if someone had three separate 5-minute exposures to someone with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes, they are a close contact. (People who are exposed to someone with COVID-19 after the infected person completed at least 5 days of isolation are not considered close contacts.)

However, the CDC has an [exception](#) to this definition for certain Pre-K through 12th grade school settings. APH recommends schools refer to the “Who is a Close Contact in a Pre-K – 12 Indoor Classroom Setting,” posted on the [APH Schools and Education web page](#) for guidance on applying the CDC’s K-12 exception to the close contact definition.

Masking

Regardless of vaccination status, 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 mask indoors until 10 full days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19. On days 6-10 after last exposure, individuals returning from a 5-day quarantine period should be distanced 6 feet from others when masks must be removed indoors (such as during lunch or snack time, band practice, choir, etc.).

Testing

If a close contact develops symptoms, they should [get tested](#) immediately and isolate until they receive their test results. If they test positive, they must [isolate](#) at home.

If a close contact does 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 at home at follow other isolation precautions](#).
- 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.

Close contacts should wear a [well-fitting mask](#) for 10 days after the date of last close contact when around others at home and in public. They should not go places where they are unable to wear a well-fitting mask.

Schools can refer to the “Flow Charts with COVID-19 Testing Guidance for Schools and Child Care” posted at [APH COVID-19 web page for schools](#) for details on when individuals can return to school after testing.

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 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 are a 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. TTS participants should get tested at least upon notification of their close contact and again 5-7 days after their last close contact with someone 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 (such as for snacks, meals, or 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.