

# DANE COUNTY SCHOOL OPERATING GUIDANCE

May 2021

## Introduction

With the expiration of Order #16 on June 2 at 12:01am, Public Health Madison & Dane County will shift from requirements to recommendations and guidance for schools. While we are moving away from Orders, the mainstays of COVID-19 prevention remain largely unchanged and schools can continue to use the measures they have successfully used over the last year to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. As vaccination rates increase, infection rates decrease, and younger children become eligible for vaccination in the coming months, we anticipate guidance will change.

**Given that younger children remain unvaccinated, summer guidance is largely unchanged with the exception of options provided for modified quarantine found in this document.**

We continue to support the strategies outlined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including their [Guidance for a Safe Return to School](#) (updated May 2021). This guidance reiterates that schools should implement layered prevention strategies and that, based on data and science, masking should be prioritized.

## Face Coverings

At this time, the CDC's mask guidance for schools remains unchanged. We and the CDC continue to recommend that all students and staff consistently wear face coverings at school.

Face coverings are most important when indoors. When face coverings cannot be worn (such as during lunch), it is important to maintain six feet distancing where possible.

## Vaccinated & Unvaccinated People

We recommend that schools continue to follow school-specific CDC guidance, which does not distinguish between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. School administration can decide whether or not to employ [CDC's Interim Recommendations for Vaccinated People](#) with respect to a group of fully vaccinated students and staff for extracurricular school-based activities. We recommend school administration consider how they would determine vaccination status among staff and students.

## Quarantine & Isolation

### Isolation

All individuals who test positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should isolate according to the [Release from Isolation & Quarantine document](#). Schools must report positive cases to Public Health Madison & Dane County through WEDSS or by calling the Communicable Disease Nurse on-call line at (608) 266-4821. In the event of a positive case, we continue to recommend contact tracing and quarantining of all identified close contacts.

## Quarantine

Emerging data and science suggests that updating quarantine guidance for fully masked individuals in the school environment is allowable. Given that in-school transmission among masked individuals continues to pose low risk among students, either of the following quarantine recommendations are sufficient.

### **Option One: Standard Quarantine - Maintain operations as you have been doing.**

- Wear masks while at school.
- In the event of a positive case, implement the School Action Plan, which includes quarantine of close contacts.
- This continues to include an option for a 7-day quarantine if a COVID test is negative on day 6 or later and the individual remains asymptomatic.

### **Option Two: Modified Quarantine – Provide an option for in-school quarantine of masked close contacts.**

- If an exposure occurs between masked individuals, the exposed students and staff may continue to attend school in-person, fully masked. These individuals would be instructed to quarantine from non-classroom activities including extracurricular activities and outside of school activities.
- The modified quarantine option may only be employed if masks are consistently worn in the school environment. Schools that have chosen to make masks optional do not qualify for modified quarantine and should continue with standard quarantine for all close contacts.

### **Examples**

Below are a few examples to illustrate this change in guidance. These examples assume both students are unvaccinated. Keep in mind this only applies to summer school and not to out-of-school scenarios.



**Example 1:** Two students are masked indoors or outdoors at all times. One student later tests positive for COVID-19. The other student is identified as a close contact.

#### **Action Needed:**

- The person who tested positive for COVID-19 would need to isolate.
- The close contact would not need to quarantine from school, but would need to quarantine from all other activities, including extracurricular and out of school activities. This student could return to their normal activities on day 8 of their quarantine with a negative antigen or PCR test on day 6. The test would need to be proctored and as such, an at-home OTC test is not acceptable.

Two students  
unmasked for some  
period of time




**Example 2:** Two students are unmasked indoors or outdoors for any amount of time. One student later tests positive for COVID-19. The other student is identified as a close contact.

**Action Needed:**

- The student who tested positive for COVID-19 would need to isolate.
- The close contact would need to quarantine from school, extracurricular activities, and out of school activities. This student could return from quarantine on day 8 with a negative antigen or PCR test on day 6. The test would need to be proctored and as such, an at-home OTC test is not acceptable.

Masked person tests  
positive, close  
contact unmasked



**Example 3:** One student is masked indoors and another student is unmasked. The masked student later tests positive for COVID-19, and the unmasked student is identified as a close contact.

**Action Needed:**

- The student who tested positive for COVID-19 would need to isolate.
- The close contact would need to quarantine from school, extracurricular activities, and out of school activities. This student could return from quarantine on day 8 with a negative antigen or PCR test on day 6. The test would need to be proctored and as such, an at-home OTC test is not acceptable.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **CDC says fully vaccinated people don't need to quarantine. What should I do if I am fully vaccinated and exposed?**

According to the CDC, a fully vaccinated person who is exposed to COVID-19 does not need to quarantine unless they develop symptoms. For this reason, if a fully vaccinated person is exposed at school, we recommend that they monitor for symptoms but do not need to quarantine. We recommend that you work with your HR or legal department to set protocols for how you will determine that someone is fully vaccinated for quarantine purposes.

### **Why are you saying that we can change quarantine in schools?**

Disease in our community is low, evidence around safe school attendance continues to emerge and together those things have allowed us to begin to ease off on different measures in a deliberate way.

Specifically, modifying quarantine is a lower risk strategy than decreasing other mitigating measures and has the added benefit of keeping more kids in school more regularly.

**Does the modified quarantine recommendation apply to all K-12 schools in Dane County?**

If the school requires masks indoors and appropriate masks were being worn correctly by both individuals during the time of exposure in the school setting, the individual who came in contact with the person with COVID-19 may quarantine at school.

**What if a school does not require masks?**

If the school does not require masks at all times indoors, then close contacts in the school setting should continue to follow the previously established quarantine protocol.

**What about other barriers such as face shields or desk shields?**

The amended guidance is specific to the use of appropriate face masks. Face shields or desk shields are not substitutes for the use of appropriate masks.

**Does this apply to student and teachers?**

Yes. The updated guidance includes students, teachers, and staff at K-12 schools.

**What if the individual with COVID-19 is wearing a mask, but the close contacts are not?**

The updated guidance only applies if the person diagnosed with COVID-19 **AND** the close contact were both wearing masks appropriately during the time of exposure in the school setting.

**Can the individual with COVID-19 return to class early if wearing a mask?**

No. The individual with COVID-19 still must isolate and not return to school until the criteria is met for release from isolation.

**Does the new guidance also apply to other settings, such as businesses?**

No. The amended guidance is specific to the K-12 school setting.

**What about exposures at lunch?**

It is important to continue to ask questions and assess the opportunity for exposures for all cases. If an individual at school meets the CDC definition of a close contact and either the case or the close contact were not wearing masks, then the close contact would need to quarantine. Physical distancing continues to be an important mitigation strategy for schools, especially during times when students cannot wear their masks, such as meal times.

**What about exposures during recess, PE, or activities such as sports, band, on the bus, etc.?**

It is important to continue to ask questions and assess the opportunity for exposures for all cases. If an individual at school meets the CDC definition of a close contact and either the case or the close contact were not wearing masks, then the close contact would need to quarantine.

**Are exposures that occur to students or staff wearing a mask outside of the school setting included in the updated guidance?**

No. The updated guidance is specific to exposures that occur while in the school setting. Students and

staff exposed to someone with COVID outside of school should not attend school. They may choose any of the three quarantine options.

**Are students and staff who are identified as close contacts to a case at school, but meet the modified guidance (proper masking), required to be in quarantine when not at school?**

Yes. Students and school staff members identified as close contacts to a case at school should quarantine to limit potential further exposure. This modified guidance serves only to create an exception for attendance at school, but does not impact the individual's designation as a close contact. Close contacts should quarantine, except for being eligible to attend school, even when both the positive case and the close contact were properly wearing masks.

**Can persons identified as close contacts but meet the modified guidance (proper masking), continue to participate in sports or other extracurricular school related activities?**

No. This modified guidance does not authorize a close contact to participate in school- associated sports, extracurricular activities or any other activities outside of the school setting. Other than attending school, these close contacts should continue to quarantine.

**How do we explain to the public that mask use can be used to modify quarantine in a school setting, but not for all others outside of a school setting?**

The revised guidance is limited to modify quarantine in school settings only. Observational analysis of eight months of experience with this novel emerging virus have shown for this age cohort in a school setting, the risk of transmission when wearing masks is decreased and the likelihood of severe disease is lower in children.