

# ACTION PLAN FOR A CONFIRMED OR SUSPECTED COVID-19 CASE IN A DANE COUNTY SCHOOL

For general school guidance, reference the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) [Education Forward Resource](#).

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has also published [Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools in Wisconsin](#). Public Health Madison & Dane County (PHMDC) will generally follow these guidelines with several exceptions:

1. Schools should not report probable cases to PHMDC or do contact tracing for probable cases
2. Close contacts at school notified by letter will not be individually contacted by PHMDC or have their symptoms monitored by PHMDC
3. Close contacts who have a positive test need to isolate but do not need to complete their quarantine if isolation is shorter
4. Schools do not need to call PHMDC if they have three people report respiratory symptoms within 72 hours

These exceptions are consistent with the guidelines PHMDC has been using for case and contact follow-up throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to these exceptions, other details may vary such as suggested communication processes, specific information requested, etc.

## Contact Tracing Process

PHMDC receives notification and contact information for all positive cases within the county. PHMDC case investigators attempt to call each individual that tests positive for COVID-19. They provide information about COVID-19 and isolation and also ask the case about who they had contact with while infectious. If the individual identifies that they were at a school while infectious, the case investigator would link the positive case to the school and then reach out directly to the school. To speed up the process, when schools are aware of a positive COVID-19 case that was inside the school building while likely infectious, the school should report the case to PHMDC.

The school nurse or designated employee(s) that will be responsible for reporting cases should request access from the Wisconsin Division of Public Health WEDSS staff. To request access, send an email to the Wisconsin Division of Public Health WEDSS staff. Contact information is available on this website: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wiphin/wedss.htm>. More than one person in a school/district can request access to WEDSS.

It is recommended that the school nurse or designated employee(s) responsible for contact tracing within the school/district take the free online [Johns Hopkins COVID-19 Contact Tracing Course](#).

## When Schools Should Report a Confirmed Case of COVID-19

Schools should report all confirmed cases of COVID-19 to PHMDC. Someone who tested positive is considered to be infectious from two days before symptom onset until they meet all of the following criteria: 24 hours fever free without fever-reducing medication, other symptoms are improving (but may still be present), and at least 10 days after symptom onset. If the individual does not have symptoms, they are considered to be infectious from two days before the test date until ten days after the test was collected. Schools should only report individuals that have a positive test result and should not report close contacts or suspected cases. For a confirmed case of COVID-19, schools do not need to ask for documentation of a positive test result from staff or students. Schools should keep a list of all cases reported to public health ([use template provided](#)).

Schools do not need to report probable cases to PHMDC (different from DHS guidelines). Students and staff who have symptoms compatible with COVID-19 should be tested to confirm or rule out COVID-19.

## What to do if there is a Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in the School Building

1. When there is confirmation that a student or employee tested positive for COVID-19, a school nurse or designated employee(s) will report the case to PHMDC through the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS).
  - a. The school should determine whether the individual was on school grounds or related transportation while infectious, working with PHMDC as necessary. For all individuals reported by a school, PHMDC will contact the school within 1-2 days of receiving the report of a positive test in most cases. If you do not hear from the case investigator within two business days of initially reporting the case, call PHMDC's Communicable Disease Nurse on-call (608-266-4821).
  - b. The school will be responsible for identifying individuals who had close contact with the person who tested positive, both on school grounds and on school-related transportation, and provide this information to PHMDC on the [provided line list](#) (see close contact definition in the section below).
  - c. PHMDC will also contact the person who tested positive to provide information about isolation and to identify close contacts outside of the school setting.
  - d. It is recommended that schools use assigned seating in the classroom and school transportation and have a system to track attendance/assigned seating in case there is someone who tests positive for COVID-19 in the school setting.
  - e. Schools should have a plan to provide a virtual learning option for students that are required to isolate or quarantine but are still able to do school work.

2. The school will contact employees and families of students identified as close contacts using the letter templates previously sent to notify them that they are a close contact and need to quarantine (if you did not receive the letter templates, please request them by contacting [coronavirus@publichealthmdc.com](mailto:coronavirus@publichealthmdc.com)). PHMDC will not contact these individuals separately unless they are in the same household as the person who tested positive. For confidentiality purposes, the individual who tested positive will not be identified in communications to the families, students and employees at large. The school may send letters without consulting with PHMDC. If the school would like to consult with PHMDC before sending letters, please wait for the case investigator to contact you as listed in #2a above.
3. For the first positive case of the 2020-2021 school year, schools may also wish to notify all families that someone in the school building tested positive and that close contacts are being notified individually by the school by using the letter template (this letter is provided directly to schools. If you need this template letter, [please email us](#)). Schools do not need to notify all families about each case (different than DHS guidelines). The fact sheet on [Paid Sick Leave Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (in English and Spanish) is a good resource to give families with this letter.

If the school does not have access to WEDSS, they can report a positive case to PHMDC by calling (608) 266-4821 and ask for the Communicable Disease Nurse on-call. After business hours, schools would leave a message. PHMDC's voicemail is confidential. When leaving a message, please include the case's name and date of birth in order to expedite follow-up. Messages left after business hours or during the weekend will be returned the next business day. After reporting the case, the case will be referred to a case investigator and the case investigator follows-up directly with the individual who tested positive and then the case investigator would contact the school afterwards. This process may take 1-2 days before the school is contacted. If the school does not hear from the case investigator within two business days of initially reporting the case, call PHMDC's Communicable Disease Nurse on-call (608-266-4821). In the meantime, the school should gather information on close contacts and send the Close Contact Letters to employees and students (this letter is provided directly to schools. If you need this template letter, [please email us](#)). The fact sheet on [Paid Sick Leave Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (in English and Spanish) is a good resource to give employees and families with this letter.

## Reporting a Case that Lives Outside of Dane County

If a case lives outside of Dane County, schools can still report the case via WEDSS or by calling the individual's local health department (list located [here](#)). By reporting the case in WEDSS, it will refer the case to the individual's local health department.

Since the school building is located in Dane County, the school should identify and notify close contacts as listed above in #3. Schools should also contact the PHMDC Communicable Disease Nurse on-call (608-266-4821) to report the case and arrange to send the line list of contacts. PHMDC will enter the contacts into WEDSS and those who live outside of Dane County will be referred to their local health department.

## School Building Closure

PHMDC will determine school and district closures on a case-by-case basis. PHMDC will review outbreak data and make a determination based on several factors, including but not limited to number of positive cases, extent of exposure, and contact tracing capacity. Schools and district administrators may also choose to close their schools and districts based on impediments to school functioning, such as high absenteeism and staff shortages.

If it is required for a school building to be closed, schools should have a plan to switch to all virtual learning. All face-to-face school activities will be canceled or rescheduled, regardless of whether the activity was to take place in the building or another location, including extracurricular activities, and field trips. Families/students and employees will be encouraged to stay at home until more information is provided by the School or PHMDC.

## Close Contact

If a student or employee had close contact with an individual who tested positive with COVID-19 the student or employee should quarantine for 14 days from the last date of exposure. If a close contact tests negative for COVID-19, they still have to quarantine for 14 days. If a close contact has a positive test for COVID-19, they should follow COVID-19 isolation guidelines (below), which may be shorter than the 14 day quarantine guideline originally provided (different from DHS guidance).

A close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of a positive COVID-19 case for 15 minutes or more within a 24 hour period. For a classroom or school transportation, a closed cohort model (where classrooms do not mix) and/or assigned seating will make it easier to identify close contacts and limit the number of people potentially exposed. It may be difficult for students to both maintain 6 feet of distance and to recall close contacts. Therefore, if school staff cannot identify close contacts in a classroom or on school transportation, the entire classroom/school bus would be required to quarantine for 14 days. If close contacts in the classroom/school bus are known, then only students/staff within 6 feet of a positive COVID-19 case would be required to quarantine.

Other situations where someone is considered a close contact:

- Had direct physical contact with a positive COVID-19 case (for example, a hug, kiss, or handshake).
- Had contact with a positive COVID-19 case respiratory secretions (for example, coughed or sneezed on; contact with a dirty tissue; shared a drinking glass, food, towels, or other personal items).
- Live with a positive COVID-19 case or stayed overnight for at least one night in a household with them.

These close contact definitions apply even if any or all parties were wearing face coverings or if physical barriers were used. These measures reduce the risk of spread but do not eliminate it.

School-based health care providers are generally not exposed if they are wearing the proper personal protective equipment outlined in the [CDC guidance for health care providers](#).

## School COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidance

Included in this document is foundational COVID-19 outbreak information for schools. For more information on COVID-19 health and safety including care for students with physical or medical needs, PPE guidance and other tools for schools, reference WI DPI's [COVID-19 Infection Control and Mitigation: Toolkit](#).

## Separation While in School

Each school must have a room or space separate from the health office where students or employees who may have COVID-19 or another communicable disease will wait to be evaluated or for pick-up. Students will be given a mask to wear if they do not already have one. Only essential employees and students assigned to the room may enter, everyone should sign-in so that there is a record of the persons who entered the room, and the room will be disinfected several times throughout the day. Strict physical distancing is recommended, and employees should wear appropriate PPE. Students who are ill will be walked out of the building to their family. For more information reference, DPI guidance linked above.

## Response to Exclusion from School or Self-Quarantine

As soon as the school becomes aware of a student or employee has COVID-19, the custodial staff will be informed so that all areas including desks, lockers, and workspaces of the person are thoroughly disinfected. [According to CDC](#), schools should close off areas used by the individual that tested positive for COVID-19 and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting. Best practice is to wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible. Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfection products external icon, including storing products securely away from students.

Schools should make plans to provide virtual learning to students who need to quarantine or when classrooms or schools are temporarily closed. These students will generally be healthy and able to participate in virtual learning while out of school.

## Siblings or Other Students in the Household

If a student has a positive COVID-19 test, their siblings or other students living in the same household would be required to quarantine as close contact. If the close contact is unable to have complete separation from the student or person who had a positive COVID test: Self-quarantine for the full 14 days after the person who tested positive ends their isolation. If able to completely separate from the person who tested positive: Self-quarantine for 14 days after last contact with the person who tested positive. If a household member has a positive test, they will then follow the COVID-19 isolation guidelines for a person with a positive test. This means they may be able to return to school before their original 14 day quarantine date (different from DHS guidance).

## Return to School After Exclusion

If a student or employee is excluded from the school environment due to COVID-19 symptoms or testing positive, they may return after they satisfy CDC's exclusion protocols.

\*Note: All close contacts are required to quarantine for 14 days from the date of last exposure even if they have a negative test.

CDC exclusion requirements are:

1. **COVID-19 symptoms and untested.** Individuals who have not received a test proving or disproving the presence of COVID-19 but experience symptoms may return if the following three conditions are met:
  - a. They have been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medications)
  - b. Their other symptoms have improved
  - c. It has been at least 10 days since their symptom onset
  
2. **COVID-19 symptoms and tested.** Individuals who experienced symptoms and have been tested for COVID-19 may return to school if the following conditions are met. Schools do not need to ask for documentation of results from staff or students.
  - a. They receive a negative test result:
    - i. If they are not a close contact, they meet other return to school criteria (e.g. fever-free for 24 hours or no vomiting/diarrhea for 24 hours)
    - ii. If they are a close contact, they meet other return to school criteria AND they complete their quarantine.
  
  - OR
  - b. They receive a positive test result:
    - i. They have been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medications)
    - ii. Their other symptoms have improved

iii. It has been at least 10 days since their symptom onset

3. **No symptoms and tested positive.** Individuals who have not had symptoms but test positive for COVID-19 may return 10 days after their test, unless they develop symptoms, then they should follow 2.b above.

For staff and students who had a positive test, schools should not require negative tests in order to return to school. People with COVID-19 can test positive for weeks after their illness but are no longer infectious. Requiring negative tests keeps people out of work/school unnecessarily.

See our fact sheet (adapted from Wisconsin Department of Health Services), [COVID-19: When a Student or Faculty/Staff Member Can Return to School](#) for more information. For more quarantining information reference, DPI's [Returning to School After COVID-19](#). For [DHS definitions of COVID-19 cases](#) reference the "Reporting and Surveillance Guidance" under "Physical Health and Safety Guidance".

## Other Key Public Health Madison & Dane County Resources

- [Q&A about Schools that have someone with COVID-19 \(in Spanish\)](#)
- [Employee is exposed to someone with COVID-19 or tested positive for COVID-19 \(in Spanish / in Mandarin\)](#)
  - Includes scenarios that are relevant to both employees and also students.
- [Paid Sick Leave Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act fact sheet](#) (in English and Spanish)