

COVID-19: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN SCHOOL AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

What are the recommendations for children and staff who have recently tested positive for COVID-19 and are exposed or experiencing symptoms again?

It is possible for someone to get sick with COVID-19 again within 90 days of their last infection. After a positive test result, a person may continue to test positive for some time, so it may be difficult to tell if another positive test within 30 days of being sick with COVID-19 indicates a new infection. If someone has been exposed to a person with COVID-19 within 30 days of their last infection **and** is experiencing symptoms, we recommend:

- Staying home until symptoms begin to improve (if they had a fever, waiting at least 24 hours after they are fever-free to be around others) and
- Wearing a high quality, well-fitting mask when around others for 10 full days after the exposure.

If it has been more than 30 days since their last infection, they can use an antigen test (such as a [rapid at-home test](#)). More than one antigen test may be needed to get an accurate result – [the FDA explains](#) more about why this is necessary.

Regardless of their vaccination status and whether they've been exposed or infected in the past, if the person has a new exposure to someone with COVID-19, they should wear a high quality, well-fitting mask when around others for 10 full days after their exposure. Read more about [what to do after exposure to COVID-19](#) on our website.

Should schools and childcare programs require a negative test for children and staff before returning to the facility after they have been sick with COVID-19?

No, we do not recommend requiring a negative test before returning to school, childcare, or work. Children and staff may return to the facility after testing positive if they fit the following criteria:

- It has been at least 5 full days after their symptoms began (or if they never develop symptoms, 5 full days after their initial positive test), and
- They have been fever-free for at least 24 hours (without taking fever-reducing medications), and
- Other symptoms are improving.
- On days 6-10, they should wear a well-fitting, high quality mask around others.
 - If unable to safely wear a mask when around others (e.g., children under 2 or people with certain disabilities), the individual should continue to isolate at home for 10 days.
 - If the staff member or child has access to antigen tests, they may be able to remove their mask sooner than day 11 (or return to the facility sooner than day 11 if unable to safely and consistently wear a mask). See our [Using Testing to End Masking After Isolation](#) webpage.

See the CDC's [Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#) page for more information.

Should children or staff members use at-home tests to determine whether they have COVID-19?

At-home COVID-19 antigen tests are widely available and often more convenient than provider-based tests; however, they are less accurate than laboratory-based PCR tests. If children or staff members choose to use at-home tests, the [FDA recommends](#) using more than one at-home test to reduce the chance of receiving a false negative result.

Those with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) should take **2 at-home tests at least 48 hours apart**:

- The first test should be **early on** in their illness, such as the first day they experience symptoms or the day after.
- Those who have a known exposure to someone with COVID-19 AND experiencing symptoms should follow [isolation precautions](#) until receiving both test results.
- If both tests are negative, they may return to school or childcare as long as they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours and their other symptoms are improving.
- If either test is positive, they must follow [isolation precautions](#).

Those without symptoms who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should take **3 at-home tests, waiting at least 48 hours in between tests**:

- They may attend work, school, or childcare as long as they wear a high-quality, well-fitting mask when around others for 10 full days after their exposure.
- The first test should be taken at least 5 days after exposure.
- Even if all 3 tests are negative, the individual should mask when around others for 10 full days after their exposure.
- If any of the tests are positive, they must follow [isolation precautions](#).

NOTE that at-home tests are not authorized for use on children under the age of 2 years.

What if a child who is unable to mask safely has a COVID-19 exposure?

CDC does not recommend that children younger than 2 years old wear a mask, and it may be difficult for very young children or for some children with disabilities to wear a mask safely. Since CDC no longer recommends quarantine for people exposed to someone with COVID-19, we recommend your facility take additional precautions. This includes but isn't limited to: increased ventilation, universal masking among their group or classroom, and screening testing among their group or classroom. Parents and guardians who choose to quarantine their child at home after an exposure should be supported in their decision to do so.

What are the COVID-19 testing options for very young children?

Pharmacies, such as [Walgreens](#) and [CVS](#), can test children aged 3 years and older. At-home COVID-19 testing kits are approved for ages 2 years and older. Parents of children under 2 years who need to get their child tested should contact their child's pediatrician.

How should meal breaks (lunches, snack time, etc.) be handled for children who are wearing masks due to a recent COVID-19 exposure or infection?

Consider implementing additional precautionary measures during meal times due to the fact that children who were recently exposed to or infected with COVID-19 will be removing their masks to eat.

These measures include, but are not limited to:

- Increasing ventilation in the classroom or cafeteria.
- Creating smaller cohorts for meal time periods.
- Ensuring proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
- Cleaning the classroom or cafeteria daily.
- Maximizing social distancing up to six feet.

Find additional information and diagrams [on the CDC's website](#).

Additional Resources

- [CDC: Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#)
- [CDC: Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#)
- [CDC: Ventilation in Schools and Childcare Programs](#)
- [CDC: Stay Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [CDC: COVID-19 Testing – What You Need to Know](#)
- [CDC: Types of Masks and Respirators](#)
- [DHS COVID-19: K-12 Schools](#)
- [DPI: COVID-19](#)
- [Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting in Child Care Settings](#)