

# K12 & COVID-19

## Frequently Asked Questions



**Please see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Preparing for a Safe Return to School, Operating Schools During COVID-19* and other resources available at:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

The COVID-19 situation is a rapidly changing one. Information in this document is current as of July 30, 2020, and is subject to change.

**Updates: Q-8 under Identifying Cases in Schools**

### Identifying Cases in Schools

**Q-1: If a parent, spouse or other household member that lives with a student or staff member tests positive, is this considered a confirmed case in the school?**

**A-1:** Assuming the infected individual did not enter the school, this would not be considered a confirmed case in the school. The student or staff member who lives with the infected individual would be considered a close contact and would be asked to self-quarantine for 14 days. Note: If the student or staff member develops symptoms and/or tests positive while in quarantine, a new case investigation and 10-day isolation period would begin.

**Q-2: If one student in a classroom tests positive for COVID-19, is everyone in that same classroom considered a close contact?**

**A-2:** Each positive case within a classroom will be investigated to determine if other students/staff are close contacts (The CDC defines a close contact as any individual who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 2 days before illness onset or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection until the time the patient is isolated.) Close contacts will be notified and will need to complete a 14-day quarantine period to monitor for symptoms.

**Q-3: Will schools be notified if one of their staff or students is identified as a close contact of someone testing positive for COVID-19?**

**A-3:** No. DOH will alert a school any time one of their students becomes a positive case. Through conversation with an infected individual (or a student's parent/guardian), DOH will work to identify close contacts, including school close contacts. DOH will notify close contacts of potential exposure and direct the individual to self-quarantine for 14 days from the last exposure. Close contacts will receive a written notification at the beginning of their quarantine period specifying their completion date for quarantine. If an individual becomes symptomatic and tests positive during their quarantine, they will begin a 10-day isolation period from the date of their symptom onset.

**Q-4: If one of our students lives and is tested in a different state but goes to school in a South Dakota school, will that student's positive test result still be reported to school officials?**

**A-4:** Investigation of a person positive for COVID-19 is completed by the public health agency in the state where the person resides. Schools can expect that public health agencies in surrounding states will follow protocol similar to that being used in South Dakota, meaning that a school should be notified of a positive case, even if the student lives in and is tested in another state.

**Q-5: If a school is notified mid-day of a positive case within our building(s), is the recommendation to immediately close the building in order to prepare for cleaning or close at the end of the school day?**

**A-5:** DOH would not recommend school closure mid-day. Dismissal at the end-of-day is appropriate. Currently, CDC recommends waiting 24 hours, if feasible, before cleaning and disinfecting an affected area. Reinforce the importance of mitigation strategies such as social distancing, hand washing, symptom screening, cloth face coverings, etc.

**Q-6: If a student who is identified as a close contact by the DOH tests negative for COVID-19 during the 14-day quarantine period, can they return to school?**

**A-6:** No. If a student tests negative during their quarantine period, the individual still needs to remain in quarantine until 14 days have passed since their last exposure.

**Q-7: When a student has been identified as a close contact or has tested positive for COVID-19, do we need to receive confirmation from the DOH before excusing them from school, or will a parent's word suffice?**

**A-7:** For a close contact, DOH alerts individuals directly. It is up to the individual identified as the close contact to let the school know of this status. For a positive case, DOH will contact the school. An individual may receive notification of a positive case from their healthcare provider sooner than the DOH receives notification of the case. It would be advisable for the school to excuse based on the report from the parent, as DOH notification may be delayed.

**Q-8: What do we do if a student has tested positive for COVID-19, but their parent refuses to obey isolation orders (i.e. continues to send the child to school despite being told not to)?**

**A-8:** The school should work through the DOH person working the case to obtain a public health order. If the child continues to come to school, in violation of the public health order, the DOH may seek court enforcement of the order.

**Q-9: Will the DOH or DOE let school officials know when a student can return to school, whether they're a close contact or a confirmed case?**

**A-9:** The Department of Health will alert a school of any student in the school who has tested positive, but the department will not alert the school when an individual (positive case or close contact) is released from isolation or quarantine. DOH will provide a letter to positive cases who complete their isolation period indicating they can return to school. The DOH will also provide a letter to the close contacts at the beginning of their quarantine period which will identify the completion date for quarantine. Parents will be responsible to provide these letters to the school.

**Q-10: Are school employees considered critical infrastructure workers? And does a declaration of such affect the 14-day quarantine period?**

**A-10:** Please refer to the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency guidance](#) on issues related to critical infrastructure. As a state, South Dakota has not identified specific critical infrastructure fields.

Schools may want to consider following the [CDC's return to work practices](#) for healthcare providers if they are struggling to staff a building. Example: If a school considers a particular staff member a critical infrastructure worker and that staff member is a close contact of a positive case but has *no symptoms*, the staff member could ensure they have no symptoms each day (including through a temperature check) and wear a face covering appropriately for 14 days following the exposure. If at any time during the 14 days the individual develops symptoms, they should *not* be at work.

## Infection Control

### **Q-1: Many people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic. Should we still screen students for temperature and symptoms?**

**A-1:** DOH and DOE are encouraging schools to use a variety of mitigation strategies in their planning for SY 2020-21. On July 23, CDC released [new guidance specific to screening](#). This guidance does not recommend universal screening of students be conducted by schools. The guidance does say that parents/caregivers should conduct daily monitoring of their children for signs of infectious illness, and students who are sick should not attend school in-person.

### **Q-2: Are the DOH and DOE requiring students to wear masks?**

**A-2:** The DOH and DOE encourage school leaders to use a variety of mitigation strategies in their planning for SY 2020-21. In selecting which to use, school leaders need to balance public health considerations and current conditions of the virus in their communities with the overall health of students and staff.

On July 23, the CDC released [Guidance for K-12 School Administrators on the Use of Face Coverings in School](#). It offers general guidelines and recommendations on this topic. In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that school leaders and health advisors "consider whether the use of cloth face coverings is developmentally appropriate and feasible and whether the policy can be instituted safely."

### **Q-3: Are the DOH and DOE requiring staff to wear masks?**

**A-3:** See the answer above. Additionally, current science suggests that adults are more susceptible to complications from COVID-19 than students. School leaders will need to balance public health considerations and current conditions of the virus in their communities with the overall health of students and staff. A staff members' duties would influence the type of infection control equipment that is appropriate for that situation.

**Q-4: Can schools require students and staff to wear masks if they wish?**

**A-4:** Yes. This would be a local policy decision. See questions above and [CDC guidance regarding face coverings in school](#).

**Q-5: Should teachers use clear face shields in place of cloth masks, so students can pick up on facial cues and mouth formations?**

**A-5:** From a public health perspective, clear face shields are a tool for protection against COVID-19, specifically around the eyes, but they do not replace face coverings due to large gaps on the side and bottom. From an educational perspective, clear face shields may be appropriate when it is important that students can see a teacher's facial expressions and mouth movements; for example, in the case of teaching English language learners and students who are deaf or hearing impaired.

**Q-6: How do we handle students who are wearing the same masks over and over without washing? Do the masks become less effective in that case?**

**A-6:** Cloth masks should be washed regularly. The CDC offers information on [How to Wash Cloth Face Coverings](#).

**Q-7: Will the DOH and DOE help schools in supplying infection control materials, or should we seek out other supply chains on our own?**

**A-7:** Schools will need to purchase their own infection control supplies. Schools can purchase certain supplies off of the State's contracts. To learn more, visit the Bureau of Administration's website at [boa.sd.gov](http://boa.sd.gov).

## Communication with Parents and Students

### **Q-1: Will the state help school leaders communicate with their school community if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19?**

**A-1:** The Department of Health communicates directly with individuals who test positive for COVID-19, as well as their close contacts. The Departments of Health and Education will also assist a school in determining best methods for communicating with the larger school community about a positive case(s). Communication should be designed to address the school community's desire for information, while also protecting student/staff privacy.

### **Q-2: How do we communicate with our school community while still following HIPAA and FERPA?**

**A-2:** Communication to the broader school community will need to be general and protect student/staff privacy. DOH will handle communication with any individuals who test positive, as well as their close contacts, directly. DOH may enlist the help of school leaders in identifying close contacts. When DOH shares this type of information, school personnel would be bound by FERPA requirements to keep this information confidential.

### **Q-3: How do we best calm anxiety about returning to school?**

**A-3:** Communication is critical. Be transparent in your communications at the local level with your school board, families, and the larger community. This is crucial to managing expectations. Let parents, staff, and students know that guidance, practices, and policy will change as our understanding of the virus improves. Remember that this is a stressful time for everyone. Encourage kindness and empathy.

## Attendance, Assessment and Accountability

### **Q-1: Will DOE be revisiting attendance standards due to the possibility of students needing to stay home for extended periods of time (because of being identified as a close contact or testing positive for COVID-19)?**

**A-1:** Attendance policy is a local decision. This applies whether a student is involved in face-to-face learning, remote learning, or some combination thereof. DOE recommends

that schools communicate with parents – clearly and early on – about how attendance will be determined in the case of remote learning. Schools should continue to record daily attendance, with the expectation that instruction is occurring, and students are engaged (no matter their physical location). If a student is unable to continue learning due to illness, schools would treat the situation as they would any other illness and in accordance with local attendance policy. Concerning the 94% target attendance rate used for school accountability purposes (ARSD 24:55), that rule remains in place.

**Q-2: Will the state assessment be administered in SY 2020-21?**

**A-2:** At this time, South Dakota plans to administer required state assessments in the normal timeframe.

Instructional Hours

**Q-1: Will schools need to meet statutory requirements related to instructional hours for SY 2020-21?**

**A-1:** The expectation is that schools will be able to meet the minimum hour requirements of SDCL 13-26-1, whether through face-to-face learning, remote learning, or some combination thereof. When calculating instructional hours, these remote learning days count the same as a day of instruction and should be recorded as such in the student information system. DOE also understands that conditions surrounding the virus and its spread may change. SB 188 passed during the 2020 legislative session provides some flexibility for the Secretary of Education to waive this requirement, as long as the Governor’s declared state of emergency is in place.

Activities

**Q-1: Can schools hold sports, music, drama and other activities? If so, how?**

**A-2:** The South Dakota High School Activities Association is working on a plan for holding school activities this upcoming school year. Both DOH and DOE have representatives on the planning group.