

Ohio Department of Health Issues New COVID-19 Quarantine Guidance for Schools

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On Monday, October 25, the Ohio Department of Health ("ODH") held a press conference to update COVID-19 school quarantine guidance that aims to keep asymptomatic children at school. This update comes after 10 schools in Warren County adopted a pilot "[Mask to Stay/Test to Play](#)" program. In announcing the guidance, ODH made clear that schools are not required to adopt the policies recommended in the guidance, and parents may choose to opt-out of the recommended protocols.

The new guidance applies to those exposed to COVID-19 in a school setting or school-related activity. Those that are exposed outside of the school setting or school-related activity should follow the standard guidelines that existed prior to the announcement.

Mask to Stay

The new guidance provides that direct contacts (those individuals identified as being directly exposed to COVID-19 by a positive case), *regardless of vaccination or masking status*, may remain in the classroom setting or school related activity if they:

- Wear a mask for 14 days after their last date of exposure;
- Self-monitor or parent-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19; and
- Isolate and get tested if they experience symptoms associated with COVID-19.

Students and staff may discontinue these procedures after seven days if they (1) do not develop symptoms and (2) test negative between days five and seven following exposure.

Test to Play

Under this new guideline, asymptomatic students may continue to take part in extracurricular

activities following exposure if they test for COVID-19 on initial notification of the exposure and wear a mask when able (e.g. when traveling on a bus, in locker rooms, and when sitting or standing on the sidelines). The student must also test again between five and seven days after exposure. If the student is negative at the time of the second test, the student may resume normal activities after day seven.

Permitted Tests

The tests that may be used under these guidelines are SARS-CoV-2 viral (PCR or Antigen) tests. The tests *cannot* be an over-the-counter test that is entirely self-administered.

Athletic Competitions

The guidance specifies that districts should consider same day testing for athletic competitions where there is the potential of school-to-school exposure. If students involved in a competition become positive for COVID-19, contact tracing with the other team is not necessary; instead districts should send a letter to notify the other team of the potential exposure.

Next Steps

School Districts should review and modify their quarantine rules based on this guidance, also keeping in mind the HB 244 prohibitions against discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals that went into effect on October 13, 2021.

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