



HISD COVID-19 Response **Toolkit**

Procedural Guidelines for COVID-19 Reporting, Notification,
& Case Management in HISD Schools

August 2022



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Introduction ►►

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders, and nurses have gone above and beyond to prioritize the health and safety of our students, teachers, and families. As we continue to work together to ensure as many students as possible can access the benefits of in-person learning, we have updated our COVID-19 procedural guidelines to reflect the most recent guidance from health and education experts.

These guidelines will assist with the management of reporting confirmed positive COVID-19 cases to Houston Independent School District's (HISD) Health and Medical Services Department (HMS). HMS developed these guidelines based on the latest guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), local public health authorities, and the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

The guidelines reflect the latest understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic and are subject to change over time as scientific understanding and guidance progress. As with all health and medical matters, confidentiality must be maintained regarding COVID-19 information and the health of individuals.



Updates as of August 2022

- In alignment with the CDC, this guidance document no longer recommends quarantine due to exposure, including ongoing exposure.
- Employees must self-report positive COVID-19 cases utilizing the e-report form. Nurses will continue to complete an e-report form for students with confirmed positive COVID-19 cases.
- In alignment with recommendations from HISD and CDC information regarding the Omicron variant, this guidance document provides that contact tracing will be replaced with a Notification of Positive COVID-19 case.
- In alignment with the CDC, this guidance document provides that isolation and quarantine length is reduced for individuals who are asymptomatic, whose symptoms are improving or have recently been fully vaccinated or received a booster.
- In alignment with the CDC, rapid antigen tests and PCR tests are acceptable viral tests for detecting a SARS-CoV-2 infection at the time of the test.





COVID-19 101 ►►

COVID-19 is a highly contagious, viral infection that causes respiratory illness and often presents with a range of symptoms like a cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty breathing. Even still, there is abundant evidence that schools are safe to remain open and provide uninterrupted learning for students during the pandemic provided that schools consistently implement layered mitigation measures.

Here's what we know:

1. COVID-19 case rates have consistently been lower among children than adults.
2. Children rarely get severely ill from COVID-19. Most infected children are asymptomatic or experience mild illness.
3. Teachers are not at greater risk of COVID-19 than other essential workers and professions involving in-person interactions.
4. Layered mitigation measures reduce transmission in schools, especially correct and consistent mask-wearing, physical distancing, and quarantining as needed.
5. As increasingly transmissible COVID-19 variants develop, it is important to do everything we can to reduce community spread. Vaccines are our best tool to reduce community spread, including in the face of new variants—it is critical that everyone who can be vaccinated does so, and that access to vaccinations is increased quickly and equitably.

The health and safety of the HISD community starts with self-regulating and monitoring for symptoms. HISD employees, older students, and parents/guardians of younger students should complete a daily self-health screen. This is not intended to diagnose or treat a disease or other conditions, but rather to identify those staff and students with possible infectious illness before they arrive at school.

All HISD stakeholders should stay home if they are sick and/or display symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., severe headache, cough, fever, diarrhea, loss of taste, loss of smell, severe fatigue, or muscle aches) which cannot be explained by another pre-existing illness or condition.

HISD students and employees must immediately notify the school if they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19:

- Parents/guardians should contact the School Nurse
- Staff should contact their immediate supervisor and/or Principal. Staff must also complete an online self-report for all confirmed positive cases.

Together with other mitigation efforts, including increased frequency of hand-washing, voluntary use of masks, and better ventilation and building sanitation, these efforts will help keep the entire HISD community safe.





Symptoms

The following symptoms are consistent with COVID-19, although the appearance of any one symptom is insufficient to make a diagnosis. Students or staff members exhibiting symptoms should seek an appointment with a healthcare provider and get tested.

A temperature greater than or equal to 100.0F

Chills

Cough

Difficulty breathing

Shortness of breath

Fatigue

Headache

Chills

Sore throat

Congestion or runny nose

New loss of taste or smell

Significant muscle ache or pain

Diarrhea

Nausea or vomiting

Close Contacts

People who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 need to monitor themselves for symptoms, regardless of their vaccination status or if they were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 90 days by testing positive via viral test. **They need to isolate immediately if they experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or have a fever.**





Isolation 101 ►►

The CDC describes self-isolation as a mitigation effort “used to separate people infected with COVID-19 from those who are not infected.” The purpose of self-isolation is to separate the infected individual from uninfected individuals and, as a result, limit the spread of the virus. An individual who has been advised to self-isolate takes the following actions:

- Stays home until it’s safe for them to be around others ([see section on Isolation Return to Work on page 7](#)).
- To the extent possible, stays away from other people in their household by staying in a specific “sick room or area, and using a separate bathroom.”

When do students or staff need to self-isolate?

The CDC recommends that the following individuals self-isolate:

- An individual with a positive COVID-19 test result
- An individual with a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis from a medical doctor
- An individual with symptoms consistent with COVID-19

If a student begins exhibiting symptoms while at school, they should visit the School Nurse, who can assess the student and, if necessary, place them in the Student Health Isolation Pod (SHIP) where they will remain under supervision until their parent/guardian can come pick them up. The SHIP cannot be located inside the School Clinic.

If a student is exhibiting symptoms prior to leaving for school, the parent/guardian should keep the child at home and contact the School Nurse to report the student’s absence.

If a staff member begins to exhibit symptoms while at school, they must go home immediately after reporting to the School Nurse, School Principal, or their immediate supervisor. If a staff member begins to exhibit symptoms prior to reporting to work, they should stay home and contact their immediate supervisor to report their absence.

Students and staff members exhibiting symptoms consistent with COVID-19 must contact their healthcare provider and get a COVID-19 test as soon as possible to confirm an infection.

Individuals who come in close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 **do not need to quarantine** if they are symptom-free and fever-free.

Additional Resources:

- For staff: See infographic entitled, “Free COVID-19 Testing for Employees”
- For students: See infographic entitled, “Get Tested for COVID-19”





When may self-isolating students or staff return to school/work?

A student or staff member who has tested positive for COVID-19 or received a diagnosis from a medical doctor, must self-isolate until it is safe to be around others. It is safe to be around others when each of the following criteria have been met:

- ✔ It has been 5 days since the onset of symptoms or the positive COVID-19 test result, and;
- ✔ The individual has remained fever-free for 24-hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, and;
- ✔ Other symptoms related to COVID-19 are improving (except for loss of smell or taste, which may persist for weeks or months after recovery).

A student or staff member with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 must self-isolate while awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test. If the student or staff member receives a negative COVID-19 test they can return to school/work when the following is true:

- ✔ The individual has remained fever-free for 24-hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, and;
- ✔ Symptoms are improving.

The parent/guardian may choose to take their student to see their doctor rather than, or in addition to, getting a test to confirm COVID-19. The student can return to school with written clearance from their doctor.

The school nurse can still make a Medical Referral if the student's symptoms warrant one. In those cases, clearance from a medical professional can still be required for the student to return to school.

Additional resources:

- See infographic entitled, "Understanding Isolation"
- See infographic entitled, "How Long Does a Student or Staff Member Need to Isolate"
- See template entitled, "Healthcare Provider Report"





Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case ►►

Why does it matter?

When the School Nurse receives confirmation that a student/staff member is positive for COVID-19, they take the following actions:

- Informing classes, groups, or activities that they were exposed to COVID-19 and should monitor their health for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Helping people who were exposed to COVID-19 know to get tested.
- Asking people to self-isolate if they have or may have COVID-19 or if they are experiencing symptoms.

Roles and responsibilities

The School Nurse takes the lead on issuing a Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case. For schools without a School Nurse, the Principal or their designee(s) is responsible for doing so.

Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case only happens once an individual has been confirmed to be COVID-19 positive.

When the School Nurse receives confirmation that a student/staff member is positive for COVID-19, they will determine what classroom / activity / or program the positive individual engaged in.

Once the School Nurse or designee has determined when the positive individual was on campus and the classroom / activity / or program they were engaged in, the School Nurse will issue a Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case to parents/guardians instructing them to monitor their child for symptoms and what to do if their child develops symptoms.

The final step is to complete the [HISD COVID-19 Case Reporting eForm](#) for students. Staff will be self reporting their confirmed COVID-19 positive information.

Additional resources:

- See letter titled, "Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case"

What do you do if you need help?

Though HISD is no longer requiring contact tracing this process can still be time consuming. If the School Nurse, Principal, or Principal's designee needs assistance completing the process, HISD's HMS Nurse Manager is able to assist. COVID19@hisd.org





Family Communications ►►

Why does it matter?

Communicating clearly and consistently with families regarding COVID-19 is important for building and maintaining trust by ensuring families know their next steps and have the support they need to complete them.

What communications do families need to receive regarding COVID-19?

When the School Nurse receives confirmation of a COVID-19 case, a communication must be prepared and given to the student's parent/guardian outlining the timeline for the student's self-isolation. Additionally, the following families must be notified within the same business day:

- Students/staff who are in the same class / activity / or program as the COVID-19 positive individual must receive notification of a positive case.

When the School Nurse determines that a student may be positive for COVID-19 as a result of their symptoms, a communication must be prepared and given to the student's parent/guardian outlining the need for the student to self-isolate and get tested for COVID-19. For students self-isolating as a result of a presumed COVID-19 infection, a reminder to see a healthcare provider and get tested for COVID-19 should be sent.

The following communication templates are included as part of this toolkit:

- [Notice to Self-Isolate Due to Confirmed Covid-19 Positivity](#) for the parent/guardian of the confirmed COVID-19 positive student
- [Notice to Self-Isolate Due to Probable Covid-19 Positivity](#), and accompanying [Healthcare Provider Report](#), for the parent/guardian of the probable Covid-19 positive student
- [Notice of Positive COVID-19 Case](#) for students in the positive child's class / activity / or program





Roles and responsibilities

The Principal, in consultation with the School Nurse, must determine who will be responsible for preparing and sending these communications to impacted families. These communications can be a combination of personal phone call, email, call out, or letter sent home:

The following is an example approach for handling these communications.

- **Personal phone call:** Given the sensitive nature of the information being shared, the Principal, School Nurse, or other administrator must make personal phone calls to the following individuals to provide information and advise on next steps:
 - Families whose children need to self-isolate due to a confirmed COVID-19 infection
 - Families whose children need to self-isolate due to symptoms consistent with a COVID-19 infection
- **Email, call out, or letter sent home:** The Principal must designate a staff member to prepare a communication to families who need to be notified of a positive case in their classroom / program/ or activity.
- **Email or call out:** The Principal must designate a staff member to prepare an email or call out to the following individuals to provide reminders:
 - Families whose children need to self-isolate due to symptoms consistent with a COVID-19 infection must be reminded to get a COVID-19 test and see their medical doctor
 - Families whose children are in isolation must be reminded on Day 5 that they can return to school the following day if they have remained fever-free for 24-hours





Case Reporting ►►

Why does it matter?

HISD is monitoring county-level and system level-level data carefully, and working to ensure that local cases are being reported to both City of Houston Health Department and the Texas Education Agency.

School level data is the critical measure that HISD uses to ensure the necessary steps are being taken to keep our students, staff, and families safe, and to maintain in-person schooling. HISD's HMS team conducts weekly data monitoring to evaluate what is happening at the school level and, based on that monitoring, HISD leadership may consider a set of school-level interventions such as data auditing, additional staff training, or a brief and temporary suspension of in-person learning.

Roles and responsibilities

The timely completion of the [HISD COVID-19 Case Reporting eForm](#) is critical to ensuring accurate school level data. The School Nurse, Principal, or Principal's designee is responsible for the submission of the eForm on the same day they receive confirmation of a student COVID-19 case. Staff are responsible for completing the eForm when they are confirmed positive for COVID-19.

What do you do if you need help?

If the School Nurse, Principal, or Principal's designee needs assistance completing the process, HISD's HMS Nurse Manager is able to assist.





Testing Program ►►

What is the testing program?

The HISD Board approved an agreement with The Houston Health Department to provide free COVID-19 PCR testing to students and staff at designated schools.

The PCR tests will be conducted by qualified medical professionals who will collect specimens with a shallow nose swab that goes half-way to three-quarters of an inch into the nose and is rotated three times in each nostril. The test results will be expected within one day.

The testing program began in January 2022. Parents/guardians at participating schools must sign a consent form prior to participation. Parents can access the consent form at: <https://bit.ly/HISDC19Test>

Test results will only be used for public health purposes such as notifying close contacts. All data management will be in alignment with state and federal laws and policies protecting privacy and the security of data.

To learn more about COVID-19 screening testing, visit: www.HoustonISD.org/COVIDTestingFAQ or www.HoustonISD.org/HealthAlerts.

Why does it matter?

This testing program will quickly identify individuals with COVID-19, ensure individuals are able to isolate and receive medical care if necessary, and slow the spread of the virus. Regular testing is a safe and effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep schools open for in-person learning.

Regular testing is especially important for children under 5 years old to quickly detect COVID-19 and mitigate its impact, families and staff with younger children at home, and others who are not vaccinated or are otherwise at risk for getting seriously sick from COVID-19.

