



# HISD COVID-19 Response **Toolkit**

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

March 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 exposed, presumed, and 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 March 2022

- 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.
- In alignment with the CDC, COVID-19 testing as it relates to quarantine and/or on-going exposure is strongly recommended. If testing is not possible, the individual needs to continue to quarantine until they are symptom free or their symptoms are improving and they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.





## 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. Additionally, HISD stakeholders who have a household member who has symptoms indicative of probably COVID-19 must stay home for 10 days, get tested for COVID-19 on Day 5, and continue to wear a mask around others.

HISD students and employees must immediately notify the school if they have been exposed to a person confirmed to be COVID-19 positive, or if they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19:

- Parents/guardians should contact the School Nurse
- Staff should contact their immediate supervisor and/or Principal

Together with other mitigation efforts, including masks, increased frequency of hand-washing, 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

Quarantine vs. Isolation

According to the CDC: “Quarantine keeps someone who was in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 away from others while isolation is used to separate people infected with COVID-19 from those who are not infected.” Click [here](#) for a video from the CDC that explores quarantine vs. isolation.

Close Contacts

Per the CDC, close contacts are people who were “less than 6 feet away from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) from two days before illness onset (or two days prior to test specimen collection for asymptomatic individuals), until the time the patient is isolated.” Individuals can come in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 at school, at work, at home, or in the community.

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 quarantine 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. The staff member must also redo the CheckIn2Work App. If the staff member begins to exhibit symptoms prior to reporting to work, they should stay home, contact their immediate supervisor to report their absence, and complete the CheckIn2Work App.

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.

### 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 and Quarantine"
- See infographic entitled, "How Long Does a Student or Staff Member Need to Quarantine/Isolate"
- See template entitled, "Healthcare Provider Report"





## Quarantine 101 ►►

### What does it mean to quarantine?

The purpose of quarantine is to make sure that if the individual exposed to COVID-19 later develops symptoms, their contact with other individuals will have been limited. The CDC recommends for individuals that are:

- Fully vaccinated (see definition below) to continue wearing a well-fitted mask and test on day 5 if possible
- Individuals that are not fully vaccinated, but are symptom-free and fever-free to continue to wear a well-fitting mask around others (see section entitled, “When may quarantined students or staff return to school/work?” on [page 9](#))

### Additional information:

- For information on symptoms see [page 5](#)
- For information about the identification of close contacts see [page 5](#)

### Definition of Fully Vaccinated and Up to Date

The CDC defines fully vaccinated as individuals who:

- Received a booster: a person is considered “boosted” and up to date right after getting their booster shot, OR
- Completed the primary series of the Pfizer or Moderna, OR
- Completed the primary series of the J&J vaccine

### When do students or staff need to quarantine?

Individuals need to quarantine if they are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status or if they previously tested positive for COVID-19.

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:

- See infographic entitled, “Understanding Isolation and Quarantine”
- See infographic entitled, “How Long Does a Student or Staff Member Need to Quarantine/Isolate”







### When may quarantined students or staff return to school/work?

**The standard length of quarantine is 5 days, however, individuals that continue to experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and have a fever need to continue to quarantine.**

Individuals that are quarantining must do so for 5 days and can return to school/work on Day 6 if they have remained fever-free for 24-hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and their symptoms are improving.

Regardless of their return day, all individuals should continue to monitor for symptoms for a full 14 days after exposure. If an individual develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they must report those symptoms to their supervisor or the School Nurse and begin isolation.

### Additional resources:

- See infographic entitled, “How Long Does a Student or Staff Member Need to Quarantine/Isolate”
- For families, see infographic entitled, “Your Child has Tested Positive or Been Exposed to COVID-19. Now What?”

### Siblings and households

Managing quarantine and isolation in a household when family members cannot be separated can be challenging. The CDC refers to this as “ongoing exposure” meaning that a person will be repeatedly exposed to COVID-19 until the infected person is no longer able to spread the virus to other people.

The CDC outlines the following best practices to limit ongoing exposure within a household:

- The person with COVID-19 and all members of the household should wear a well-fitted mask consistently, inside the home.
- If possible, one member of the household should care for the person with COVID-19 to limit the number of people in the household who are in close contact with the infected person.





If an unvaccinated student or staff member lives with someone who is self-isolating as a result of a confirmed COVID-19 infection, or someone who has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they should take the following steps:

- ✓ Begin quarantine immediately and continue to quarantine throughout the isolation period of the person with COVID-19.
- ✓ Continue to quarantine for an additional 5 days starting the day after the end of isolation for the person with COVID-19.
- ✓ Get tested at least 5 days after the end of isolation of the infected person that lives with them.
- ✓ Isolate immediately if you develop symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive.

If a vaccinated student or staff member lives with someone who is self-isolating as a result of a confirmed COVID-19 infection, or someone who has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they should take the following steps:

- ✓ Get tested at least 5 days after your first exposure. A person with COVID-19 is considered infectious starting 2 days before they develop symptoms, or 2 days before the date of their positive test if they do not have symptoms.
- ✓ Get tested again at least 5 days after the end of isolation for the person with COVID-19.
- ✓ Isolate immediately if you develop symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive.

Managing quarantine and isolation within households can be complicated, particularly if more than one member of the household contracts COVID-19 at different times. If you have questions about a specific situation with a student or staff member at your school, contact the HMS Team for support.

#### **Additional resources:**

- For families: See infographic entitled, “When to Keep Your Children at Home.”





## 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 people 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 self-quarantine 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, the following happens:

**Step 1** is to identify the dates that matter:

- What day did the infected individual get COVID tested?
- What day did the infected individual begin experiencing symptoms?
- Take the earlier date, include the two days prior, and determine which of those days the infected individual was on campus.

*For Example:*

- *Student A began experiencing symptoms on Friday and was tested on Saturday. Starting from the earlier date, Friday, go back two days: Wednesday and Thursday.*
- *The student was on campus on Wednesday and Thursday. For these two days, we need to issue a Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case. They were not on campus on Friday, so we do not need to issue a Notification of Positive COVID-19 Case that day.*

Action	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Identify the day the individual became symptomatic and/or the day the individual took a COVID-19 test	Student was in school	Student was in school	Student was in school	Student was in school	Student stays home from school because they are not feeling well	Student takes a COVID-19 test and receives a positive result
Determine the starting point			2	1	Use the earlier of these two events as your starting point and go back two additional days	
Determine which days require a notification			Notification on this day	Notification on this day	No need to issue a notification on this day because the student was absent	





**Step 2** is to 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](#).

#### **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](mailto:COVID19@hisd.org)

<sup>3</sup> The Office of Technology shared a tutorial on how to access the Admin Portfolio Seating Chart View in PowerSchool on the portal.





## 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.

Finally, it is important that families receive consistent information during the period of self-isolation and self-quarantine to ensure they complete their next steps, enroll in Temporary Online Learning, and come back to school on the earliest possible day.

- 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.
- For students self-quarantining, a reminder to get a COVID-19 test on Day 5, and a reminder to return on Day 6 and provide the test result to the school nurse as soon as it is available.

### 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 of children who are quarantining must be reminded on Day 5 that they can return to school on Day 6
  - 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 COVID-19 case.

### 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](http://www.HoustonISD.org/COVIDTestingFAQ) or [www.HoustonISD.org/HealthAlerts](http://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.





## Resources ►►

### Glossary of Key Terms

Source: [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

- **Close Contact:** Someone who was less than six feet from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period from two days before illness onset (or two days prior to test specimen collection for asymptomatic individuals), until the time the patient is isolated.
- **Quarantine:** The separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been exposed to a communicable disease but not yet symptomatic from others who have not been so exposed to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease.
- **Isolation:** The separation of a person or group of people known or reasonably believed to be infected with a communicable disease and potentially infectious from those who are not infected to prevent the spread of the communicable disease.
- **Probable Positive:** Report of person meeting clinical and epidemiologic evidence of COVID-19 but without confirmatory laboratory evidence.
- **Confirmed Positive:** Report of person with COVID-19 and meeting confirmatory laboratory evidence.
- **Fully Vaccinated:** A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the second dose of a two-dose vaccine, such as Pfizer or Moderna, or two weeks after a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
- **Partially Vaccinated:** A person is considered partially vaccinated if they haven't received the second dose of a two-dose vaccination or two weeks has not passed since receiving the final dose of the vaccine.
- **Booster:** Three COVID-19 vaccines are authorized or approved for use in the US: Pfizer or Moderna (both are COVID-19 mRNA vaccines) and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. All three are available as a booster or third shot. The CDC recommends the:
  - Pfizer booster to anyone 16 years and older at least 5 months after completing their primary vaccination series
  - Moderna booster to anyone 18 years and older at least 6 months after completing their primary vaccination series
  - Johnson & Johnson vaccine to anyone 18 years and older at least 2 months after receiving an initial Johnson & Johnson vaccine

