

# COVID-19 at School

## Helpful Information/Considerations

The purpose of this summary is to provide guidance to schools on the application of the state's COVID-19 rules, orders, and direction. As COVID-19 cases arise, it will be helpful to understand the key points and considerations listed below. However, the most important resource to your school will be the individual assigned by your local health department to work with you in the event of a COVID-19 positive case.

### 1. Notification of a COVID Positive Case in School

The local health department ("LHD") will notify the school's designated Point of Contact ("POC"). The initial contact is often made by email with a request to contact the LHD. Keep this in mind as you monitor your emails. Ensure your POC has been submitted to the LHD. \*Note: if the director is not the POC, the director still needs to monitor their email for the health department's notification.

- a. *What if a parent/staff member tells the school they have COVID?* The school *should be* notified by the health department. Even if the school has not received official notification from the LHD, the person should isolate (if not already isolated). The school should not ask for a copy of the test results for proof. If a parent/staff member provides this initial notice, contact your LHD for further guidance. Note: if a student or staff member reports COVID-19 symptoms while at school, they should isolate.
- b. *Isolation.* Anyone who tests positive for COVID must isolate for a minimum of 10 days and be fever-free without medication for 24 hrs. before returning to school. The LHD will notify the school when the person is allowed to return.

### 2. Following Notification to the School of a Positive Case

The LHD will work with your POC to guide them through the next steps. This includes contact tracing, privacy issues, dates of return, and answering questions.

- a. Contact Tracing. One of the primary considerations for the LHD is identifying anyone who may have been "exposed" to COVID. This means anyone in close contact (closer than 6ft for 15 minutes or longer) to the person who tested positive up to two days before he or she had symptoms or tested. This includes individuals who were wearing masks. Maintaining a system that minimizes exposure and allows you to quickly and accurately identify close contacts is critical.

*Staff Interactions.* While it can be challenging to enforce social distancing requirements with students, it is critical to ensure your staff adheres to these guidelines at all times, including before/after school, lunch, breaks, etc.

- b. High Risk Individuals. The LHD will ask for a list of individuals who are at a higher risk of serious illness and may have been exposed. Consider compiling a list of students/staff members prior to any exposure to simplify the process in the event of a positive case.
- c. Quarantine Letter. Individuals that were exposed will be asked to quarantine for 14 days from the last day of exposure. Have a quarantine letter ready to send to potentially exposed individuals. NOTE: the LHD will help you determine return dates, and they (not the school) will provide quarantine notice to individuals identified by the school as being at higher risk for serious illness.

- d. Privacy Laws. Remember, COVID test results are private health information. While the person's identity may be shared with school officials to determine contact tracing and the level of risk, it should be limited to the least amount of people possible, and anyone receiving the person's name should be reminded that it cannot be disclosed. If you have questions about privacy, your LHD contact can provide additional guidance.
- e. Public Relations. A COVID positive case at your school may attract news media. It is important to instruct your staff members, especially office personnel, to direct all questions to the principal.

Staff should only provide the office phone number or principal's email address. When a secretary receives a call from the media, do not forward the call directly to the principal. Provide the principal's email address and ask the reporter to submit his/her questions via email and the principal will provide responses as soon as possible. Academics West can assist with responses.

### 3. **Mask Requirements**

The requirements regarding the wearing of face masks have been revised several times and come from various state authorities. As a result, there have been points of recurring confusion. The most common questions involve recess/PE, teachers alone in a classroom, and enforcement. More information on these questions is provided below, however, it's important to be familiar with all of the exceptions to the face mask requirement.

General Rule: Everyone must wear a face mask on school property.

*Exception – Outdoors*: If a person is outdoors on school property AND can maintain social distancing guidelines (6 ft), a mask is not required. (Source: State Public Health Order 2020-11)

*Exception – Elementary School Recess*: Elementary students are exempt from wearing a mask when engaged in outdoor recess. Cohorting, social distancing and hand washing before and after are encouraged. (Source: Appendix C of the Health Department's Phased Guidelines for the General Public, Version 4.10.)

*Exception – PE Class or School Sponsored Activity*: Students are exempt from wearing a mask when participating in a PE class or school-sponsored activity if they cannot reasonably participate while wearing a face covering. However, this exemption requires each individual to complete a symptom assessment, verbally confirm they are free of COVID-19 symptoms, and attest that they have not been in close contact with a COVID-positive person. The school must identify school-sponsored activities that are higher-risk and consider not holding the activities or introduce additional mitigating strategies. (Source: Appendix C of the Health Department's Phased Guidelines for the General Public, Version 4.10, see also, Paragraph 25, Mask Order FAQs, updated 8/21/2020.)

*Exception – Teacher Alone in Classroom*. If a teacher is alone in their classroom AND can ensure no students or other adults will be entering the classroom, they do not need to wear a face mask. It is important to use your best judgement in these scenarios. (Source: Paragraph 27, Mask Order FAQs, updated 8/21/2020)

### Enforcement of Face Mask Requirement:

The school can require a mask exemption certification from a licensed health care provider. (Source: Paragraph 21, Mask Order FAQs, updated 8/21/2020)

Students can be sent home for not wearing a mask. (Source: Paragraphs 39, 42, Mask Order FAQs, updated 8/21/2020)

### **Referenced Materials:**

To view the Mask Order FAQ's and the Utah Department of Health COVID Manual for Schools, visit the following website: <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/education/>

To view Utah's phased guidelines, visit: <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/utahs-health-guidance-system/>

State Public Health Order 2020-11: <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/special-orders/>