
**San Mateo County Coalition
for Safe Schools and Communities**

Safe Schools Framework

COVID-19 and Other Communicable Diseases

January 22, 2024

**The Guidance Will Continue to Be Updated as
New Information Becomes Available**



**Coalition for
Safe Schools &
Communities**



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
About this Document	3
Considerations	3
Vaccination	4
Air Quality	4
When Outdoor Air Quality is Good	4
When Outdoor Air Quality is Poor.....	5
Outdoor Learning	5
Masks	6
Requirements for Masks	6
Types of Masks	6
Good Hygiene	7
Case Reporting	7
Cleaning	8
Testing for COVID-19	9
Cal/OSHA Testing Requirements for Staff.....	9
Last Opportunity for Schools to Order Free Tests from CDPH.....	10
Required COVID-19 Testing Plans	10
CDPH Testing Recommendations for Other Communicable Diseases.....	10
New CDPH Isolation Guidance	10
Recommendations for Students Who Test Positive for COVID-19.....	11
Requirements for Staff Who Test Positive for COVID-19	12
Recommendations for Close Contacts of Cases	12
Notifications to Families and Staff	13
Training	14
Outbreak Definitions	14
Appendix	15
Communication Template	15

Changes from September 19, 2023, Version

This version of the framework reflects CDPH guidance around isolation ([January 9, 2024](#)) and related Cal/OSHA guidance ([January 9, 2024](#)), and updated CDPH testing guidance ([November 8, 2023](#)). *Note: the last day to order free tests from CDPH is February 29, 2024.*

About this Document

The Safe Schools Framework: COVID-19 and Other Communicable Diseases reflects the California Department of Public Health's updated focus on addressing communicable diseases, not only COVID-19. This document was developed in consultation with San Mateo County Health (SMCH) and reflects [California Department of Public Health](#) (CDPH), Cal/OSHA, and other relevant guidance. It has been and will continue to be updated as needed to reflect changes in official health department guidance.

The Safe Schools Framework addresses K-12 schools, early education sites, child care settings, before and after school programs, and summer and intersession programs.

Considerations

According to [CDPH](#), due to broad immunity from vaccination and/or natural infection and readily available treatments for infected people, California is now at a different point in time with **reduced impacts** from COVID-19 compared to prior years.

CDPH now recommends aligning COVID-related actions with those of other common respiratory viruses. These recommendations are more focused on responding to symptoms rather than positive tests, while reducing social interruption.

CDPH's guidance continues to build upon a multi-layer strategy used to manage COVID-19 and serves as a general prevention framework to reduce the spread of multiple types of infections, including COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and norovirus. Strategies are guided by the principle that safe, in-person learning and care are critical to the well-being and development of children.

CDPH and SMCH recommend that school administrators and child care providers communicate their health and safety strategies to children, parents, and staff, utilizing multiple strategies including parent communications and on-site reminders. Communication should be appropriate to the languages and literacy levels of community members.

CDPH and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) affirm the authority of local health departments, local educational agencies, and child care providers to maintain or establish additional guidance, including required actions, for facilities in their respective jurisdictions.

Please direct any questions about this document and the guidance reflected within to the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) at info@smcoe.org or 650-802-5515.

Additional resources can be found on the [CDPH Safe Schools for All Hub](#).

Vaccination

Vaccinations (also referred to as “immunizations”) can help protect against certain diseases by working with the body’s natural defenses to safely build immunity to disease. Vaccinations protect the person who receives the vaccination. In addition, if many people are vaccinated, this may reduce the burden of disease in communities and protect individuals who are not vaccinated and individuals who may not develop a strong immune response from vaccination.

CDPH-recommended actions:

1. Encourage children, families, and staff to stay [up-to-date](#) on all vaccinations recommended by their health care provider.
2. Review vaccination requirements for entry into [K–12 schools](#) and [pre-K/child care settings](#). Visit the CDPH [Shots for School site](#) or San Mateo County Health’s [Immunization Programs and Vaccines site](#) for resources related to school or child care immunization requirements.
3. Of note, COVID-19 and influenza vaccines are not included in the list of required immunizations for [school](#) or [child care](#) (see Title 17, Cal. Code of Regulations, section 6000 et seq.). However, both COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations can greatly reduce the risk of serious illness, outbreaks, absences and school disruptions, and are strongly recommended for all eligible people in California, including children, providers, teachers, staff and individuals sharing homes with child care community members. More information may be found at [CDPH Get the Facts on COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

Air Quality

The risk of getting and spreading respiratory infections is greater in indoor settings with poor air quality. Effective ventilation and filtration can reduce the spread of these infections and may also protect students, children, and staff from exposure to wildfire smoke, airborne allergens, and other pollutants.

When Outdoor Air Quality is Good

Bringing fresh outdoor air into a building helps keep virus particles from concentrating inside. This can be done by opening multiple doors and windows, using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.

For indoor spaces, ventilation should be optimized. Recommendations include:

- Open windows and doors as safety and weather permit. Per Cal/OSHA, maximize outside air provided except when EPA Air Quality Index is greater than 100 for any pollutant.
- Consider the use of sensors or other assessment tools to monitor ventilation systems and CO₂ levels.
- Ventilation system should provide at least the code-required minimum ventilation rate.

- Ventilation system filters should be MERV-rated at MERV 13 or better. They should also be properly installed (i.e., no gaps that would allow air to bypass the filter) and properly maintained (i.e., replaced as often as recommended).
- In-room (portable) air cleaners used to reduce the risk of long-range airborne transmission should provide high-efficiency filtration and a sufficient “clean air delivery rate” (CADR) (i.e., at least 2/3 of the floor area). Multiple devices per classroom may be necessary for sufficient total air cleaning.
- Optimize ventilation in transport vehicles, such as buses or vans. Open windows to increase airflow from outside when feasible and safe to do so.
- Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens.
- Explore the use of state and federal funding for ventilation upgrades.

The [CDPH Safe Schools for All Hub](#) includes several excellent resources that address indoor air quality in schools.

When Outdoor Air Quality is Poor

- If outside air quality is poor, doors and windows should be shut.
- Schools holding classes outside should be relocated inside.
- If the HVAC filter was upgraded (HEPA or MERV-13 or higher is recommended), set the central system’s circulating fan to operate continuously (set to “ON” rather than “AUTO”). HVAC, air conditioning wall units, and fans without upgraded filters should be turned off. See this [Ventilation FAQ](#) for more details.
- Use a portable air cleaner in one or more rooms. Portable air cleaners work best when run continuously with doors and windows closed.
- According to the [California Air Resource Board](#), a well-fitted NIOSH-certified N95 masks can provide protection from wildfire smoke. Cloth masks will not provide protection from wildfire smoke.
- When air quality improves, even temporarily, “air out” buildings to reduce indoor air pollution.
- Damp mop, dust, and clean with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter-equipped vacuum.
- Schools may consider dismissing students until air quality improves and proper ventilation on indoor classrooms/common areas can resume.

For resources and guidance on air quality, visit SMCOE’s [website](#).

Outdoor Learning

Holding classes and programs outdoors adds an additional layer of protection for the school community. Outdoor spaces for classes and programs provide schools with more options for meeting student needs, including reducing stress, improving mental and physical health, and helping to heal trauma. Resources to support outdoor learning can be found on [SMCOE’s website](#) and the [Green School Yards website](#).

Masks

Masks, particularly [high-quality and well-fitting masks](#), are effective, inexpensive, and easy to implement tools to protect oneself and mitigate transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

CDPH recommendations include:

- Develop and implement local protocols to provide appropriately sized, high-quality masks to children who do not have one and desire to use one.
- Wear a mask around others if you have respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, runny nose, and/or sore throat).
- Those who test positive for COVID, should wear a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days, especially in indoor settings. After ending isolation (no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and symptoms are improving), those with COVID may remove their mask sooner than Day 10 if they have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart.
- Wearing a mask is always important for those who are [at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19](#).

The following individuals should not wear face masks:

- Infants and children younger than 2 years old because of the risk of suffocation;
- All persons when they are eating or sleeping;
- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that precludes wearing a mask safely and effectively. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a mask could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance; and
- Persons for whom wearing a mask would create a safety hazard to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

Read more in the CDPH's [When and Where to Wear a Mask](#) resource.

Requirements for Masks

- CDPH requires that no person can be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into a school, unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard.
- Cal/OSHA requires schools to provide masks during outbreaks and when required by CDPH after a workplace exposure.

Types of Masks

CDPH provides the following recommendations on the types of masks and how to wear them:

- An effective mask has both good fit and good filtration.

- Gaps between the face and mask, such as above the nose or at the sides, allow air carrying virus particles to easily leak in or out without being filtered.
- Generally, masks that have head loops (rather than ear loops) have better fit, forcing the air that you breathe in and out to go through the mask and be filtered.

The CDPH provides [more information about masks](#), including masks for students.

Good Hygiene

Hand hygiene can prevent the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. The following are recommended actions:

- Teach and reinforce among students and staff:
 - [Washing hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - Avoiding contact with one's eyes, nose, and mouth
 - [Covering coughs and sneezes](#) among students and staff
- Promote hand washing throughout the day, especially before and after eating, after using the toilet, and after handling garbage, or removing gloves.
- Ensure adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, tissues, no-touch trash cans, masks, and hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent ethyl alcohol for staff and children who can safely use hand sanitizer.
- Hand sanitizers should be stored up, away, and out of sight of young children and should be used only with adult supervision for children under six years of age.

Required Actions:

- Cal/OSHA states that employers must provide for, encourage, and allow time for frequent hand washing, and provide hand sanitizer.

Case Reporting

Schools are required to report cases of communicable diseases, including COVID-19, to the local health agency per California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 17, [§2500](#) and [§2508](#). Note that CCR Title 17 §2500 has been temporarily modified by the [State Public Health Officer Order of October 4, 2022](#).

Child care centers ([CCR Title 22 section 101212\(d\)](#)) and family child care homes ([CCR Title 22 section 102416.2\(c\)\(3\)](#)) should also review Child Care Licensing requirements for outbreak reporting and consult their [local regional office](#) (PDF) for assistance.

Workplaces, schools and certain child care providers are subject to COVID-19 workplace outbreak reporting requirements set forth in [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations FAQ](#).

San Mateo County Health's reporting requirements reflect these legal requirements and streamline the process for schools and districts. The reporting requirements are as follows:

- As employers, schools and districts shall promptly notify SMCH when **3 or more cases** of epidemiologically linked COVID-19 are identified among school, district, or other employed staff within a 7-day period, regardless of epidemiological linkage.
- Report the above cases to SMCH via SMCCDControl@smcgov.org within 48 hours.
- Provide a written notice within 24 hours of exposure to all employees, and the employers of subcontracted employees, who were at the same worksite as a reported case within the case's infectious period.
- Maintain accurate records and track all COVID-19 cases while ensuring medical information remains confidential. These records must be made available to employees, authorized employee representatives, or as otherwise required by law, with personal identifying information removed.
- Report a COVID-19-related serious illness or death immediately to the nearest Cal/OSHA enforcement district office.
- If cases appear to be increasing rapidly, school liaisons should report in SMCCDControl@smcgov.org and email [HLT Covid19 SchoolTeam@smcgov.org](mailto:HLT_Covid19_SchoolTeam@smcgov.org) for guidance.

Schools or districts with questions or concerns about cases may contact SMCH at COVID19_SchoolTeam@smcgov.org or (650)573-2346.

Cleaning

Clean and well-maintained facilities reduce the spread of communicable diseases that are transmitted by contact with contaminated or high touch surfaces.

CDPH recommends the following:

- Routine daily cleaning with water and mild detergent is generally sufficient to remove most bacteria and viruses from surfaces, although additional sanitization might be necessary during certain disease outbreaks.
- School administrators and child care providers should consult with local health departments when there is an outbreak.
- If disinfectants are used, use [asthma-safer products](#).
- Drinking fountains should be open for use by students and staff. Routine cleaning is recommended.
- Train and monitor staff to follow the infection control practices for cleaning and disinfection, housekeeping and sanitation principles, and universal health precautions. The Healthy Schools Act requires anyone who uses disinfectants at a school or child care center to complete the [annual California Department of Pesticide Regulation-approved training](#). Note: This requirement does not apply to family child care homes.

Testing for COVID-19

At-home antigen-based testing, still available for COVID-19, provides individuals with convenient, rapid, and accurate test results.

The ability for symptomatic individuals to test and identify the presence of COVID-19 quickly is important. Having testing options available for symptomatic students and staff can help them return to school faster, as well as limit any on-site transmission.

CDPH does not recommend testing for those individuals who have had a previous infection within the last 30 days and do not have symptoms.

People who have had a previous infection in the past 31-90 days may be tested with an antigen test. For more information, see the CDC's [COVID-19 Testing: What You Need to Know](#).

Vaccinated or not, individuals should get tested immediately if they're feeling any [COVID-19 symptoms](#). If the first test is negative, they should test again 1 day later. If the second test is negative and the individual is still concerned about COVID-19, they should consider a third test at least a day later or request that their doctor order a laboratory-based test.

Those who are more likely to become very ill from COVID-19 should consider testing within 5 days after exposure even if they do not have symptoms. [COVID-19 medication](#) works best if started right away.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 (CDPH)

- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Fever or chills
- Sore throat
- Diarrhea
- Cough
- Congestion or runny nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Nausea or vomiting

Those who have a positive COVID-19 test should follow [CDPH's COVID-19 Isolation Guidance](#), which was updated on January 9, 2024.

Visit the State of California's [COVID-19 page](#) for information on treatment options. Medications to treat COVID-19 are widely available, and effective at reducing the severity of COVID-19 illness.

Cal/OSHA Testing Requirements for Staff

As employers, schools must offer testing at no cost and during paid time to employees who had a close contact at work, as follows:

- Who had a close contact with a person with COVID-19 during their infectious period except for recently recovered employee COVID-19 cases without symptoms.
- During an outbreak, make COVID-19 testing available to all employees within the exposed group, except for employees who were not at work during the relevant period and symptom-free employees who recently recovered from COVID-19.

Schools must also provide testing in a manner that ensures employee confidentiality.

Schools should consult [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#) for current requirements for employers, and specifically [Non-Emergency Regulations FAQs on Testing](#), for information on testing of workplace close contacts after workplace exposure. During workplace outbreaks, additional testing is required.

Last Opportunity for Schools to Order Free Tests from CDPH

CDPH provides free at-home tests to California K-12 schools. [Order tests](#) by February 29, 2024. CDPH is wrapping up this program and does not expect to make tests available after that date.

- At-home tests are meant to be used at home by individuals or parents/guardians.
- At-home test kits can be used beyond their [expiration date](#) as long as the internal control line after test development is both easily visible and the color specified by the specific test instructions.
- At-home tests can be disposed of in the regular trash.
- See [CDPH's testing FAQ](#) for more information.

Required COVID-19 Testing Plans

SB 1479 requires LEAs to create and post on their public website a COVID-19 testing plan. The testing plan must be consistent with CDPH guidance for K-12 schools. San Mateo County LEAs have a variety of options for meeting this requirement, including any of the following:

- Adopt CHPH's [Guidance for K-12 Schools and Child Care Settings to Mitigate the Spread of Communicable Disease, 2023 -2024 School Year](#) and post a link to the guidance on its website.
- Use [this template](#) testing plan, adjusting as needed, and post the completed plan on its website.
- Develop its own plan and post it on its website.

According to [SB 1479](#), LEAs are not required to maintain an on-site program or have a designated staff member to oversee testing.

CDPH Testing Recommendations for Other Communicable Diseases

At this time, there are no widely available at-home tests for the vast majority of communicable diseases. When testing is available (e.g., influenza and RSV), it should be considered by a healthcare provider based on related symptoms.

Testing is generally not recommended to receive clearance to return to school or child care.

New CDPH Isolation Guidance

As of January 9, 2024, CDPH has adjusted its recommendations to move away from five days of isolation and instead focus on clinical symptoms to determine when to end isolation.

Previous isolation recommendations were implemented to reduce the spread of a virus to which the population had little immunity and had led to large numbers of hospitalizations and deaths that overwhelmed healthcare systems during the pandemic. California is now at a different point in time with **reduced impacts** from COVID-19 compared to prior years, due to broad immunity from vaccination and/or natural infection and readily available treatments for infected people.

CDPH now recommends the following actions to align with common practice of other respiratory viruses. These actions outline what to do when a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 and how to protect others, including the most vulnerable in the community.

Recommendations for Students Who Test Positive for COVID-19

Students with COVID-19 Symptoms

1. Students should stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms, until
 - they have not had a fever for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication AND
 - other **COVID-19 symptoms** are mild and improving.
2. Students should wear a mask when they are around other people indoors for the 10 days* after they become sick or test positive. They may remove their mask sooner than 10 days if they have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart. Day 0 is symptom onset date or positive test date.
3. Anyone with COVID-19 should avoid contact with people at higher-risk for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.* Higher-risk individuals include the elderly, those who live in congregate care facilities, those who have immunocompromising conditions, and that put them at higher risk for serious illness.
4. Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, particularly if they are at **higher risk for severe COVID-19**, should speak with a healthcare provider as soon as they test positive about **treatment options**. They may be eligible for **antiviral medicines** or other treatments for COVID-19. COVID-19 antiviral medicines work best if taken as soon as possible, and within 5-7 days from when symptoms start.

*The potential infectious period is 2 days before the date of symptoms began or the positive test date (if no symptoms) through Day 10. (Day 0 is the symptom onset date or positive test date).

Students with No COVID-19 Symptoms

1. Students should wear a mask when they are around other people indoors for the 10 days* after they test positive. They may remove their mask sooner than 10 days if they have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart. Day 0 is date of positive test date.
2. Anyone with COVID – regardless of whether they have symptoms – should avoid contact with people at higher-risk for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.* Higher-risk individuals include the elderly, those who live in congregate care facilities, those who have immunocompromising conditions, and that put them at higher risk for serious illness.

*The potential infectious period is 2 days before the date of symptoms began or the positive test date (if no symptoms) through Day 10. (Day 0 is the symptom onset date or positive test date).

Requirements for Staff Who Test Positive for COVID-19

Staff with COVID-19 Symptoms

1. Staff should stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms, until
 - they have not had a fever for 24 hours without using fever reducing medication AND
 - other **COVID-19 symptoms** are mild and improving.
2. Staff must wear a mask when they are around other people indoors for the 10 days after they become sick or test positive. Day 0 is symptom onset date or positive test date.
3. Anyone with COVID-19 should avoid contact with people at **higher-risk** for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.* Higher-risk individuals include the elderly, those who live in congregate care facilities, those who have immunocompromising conditions, and that put them at higher risk for serious illness.
4. Anyone with have symptoms, particularly if they are at **higher risk for severe COVID-19**, should speak with a healthcare provider as soon as they test positive about **treatment options**. They may be eligible for **antiviral medicines** or other treatments for COVID-19. COVID-19 antiviral medicines work best if taken as soon as possible, and within 5-7 days from when symptoms start.

*The potential infectious period is 2 days before the date of symptoms began or the positive test date (if no symptoms) through Day 10. (Day 0 is the symptom onset date or positive test date).

Staff with No COVID-19 Symptoms

1. Staff must wear a mask when they are around other people indoors for the 10 days after they test positive.
2. Anyone with COVID-19 – regardless of whether they have symptoms – should avoid contact with people at higher-risk for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.* Higher-risk individuals include the elderly, those who live in congregate care facilities, those who have immunocompromising conditions, and that put them at higher risk for serious illness.

Recommendations for Close Contacts of Cases

- If a close contact develops new COVID-19 symptoms, they should test and mask right away.
- If a close contact does not have symptoms, and is at higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection and would benefit from treatment, they should test within 5 days.
- If a close contact does not have symptoms and has contact with people who are at higher risk for severe infection, they should mask indoors when around such people for 10 days. Consider testing within 5 days after the last exposure date (Day 0) and before contact with higher-risk people. For further details, see **CDPH COVID-19 testing guidance**.

As employers, schools are subject to the Cal/OSHA **COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations** and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.

Notifications to Families and Staff

- In lieu of individual exposure notifications, schools should consider providing a general notification to the entire school community during times of **elevated community transmission** of COVID-19. This communication can alert all to the increased potential of being exposed to COVID-19 due to a rise in cases among school and community members and remind all to monitor for symptoms and get tested.
- Per [CalOSHA](#), schools must notify employees of COVID-19 cases in the workplace.

DEFINITIONS

High-Risk Contact: A high-risk contact is someone who:

- may experience severe illness if they become infected with COVID-19 (for example, due to being elderly, unvaccinated or immunocompromised);
- may be more likely to transmit the virus to those who are at higher risk for severe COVID-19; and/or
- has higher transmission potential (more likely to spread virus to others due to high intensity/duration of indoor exposure to others).

Close Contact:

- In indoor spaces of 400,000 or fewer cubic feet per floor, a close contact is defined as sharing the same indoor airspace as an infected person 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) during a confirmed case's infectious period.
- In large indoor spaces greater than 400,000 cubic feet per floor, a close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period during the confirmed case's infectious period.

Spaces that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls (e.g., offices, suites, rooms, waiting areas, bathrooms, or break or eating areas that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls) must be considered distinct indoor airspaces.

Training

According to Cal/OSHA, employers must provide effective training and instruction to employees on how COVID-19 is spread and infection prevention techniques.

Outbreak Definitions

At least three COVID-19 cases within a 7-day period among people who are epidemiologically linked in the setting, and are not known to be close contacts of each other in any other case investigation,

Cal/OSHA provides the following guidance for employers in the case of an outbreak:

- Provide written notice of workplace outbreaks (three or more cases in an exposed workgroup in a 14-day period) and major outbreaks (20 or more cases within a 30-day period).

Appendix

- [Vaccination Consent Form](#)
- [Testing Guidance and Resources from the California Department of Public Health](#)

Communication Template

- [Exposure Notices – Student and During Stages](#)