



# Overview of COVID-19 Isolation for K-12 Schools

Updated Jan. 6, 2022

## What is isolation?

**Isolation** is separating people who have COVID-19 or **symptoms of COVID-19** from those who are not infected or showing symptoms in order to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. People isolate when they show symptoms of COVID-19 or are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, even if they don't have **symptoms**. Isolation is different from **quarantine**. Quarantine is used by someone who has been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 but has not tested positive for COVID-19 and does not have symptoms. Quarantine is important because even before a person has tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms, they could spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to other people without knowing it. Quarantine is used to prevent transmission of the virus by ensuring that **certain people** who have been in **close contact** with someone with COVID-19 stay apart from others. If people have symptoms and/or have a positive **viral test** for COVID-19 while in quarantine, they should immediately begin the process for isolation.

## Who needs to isolate?

People who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or are showing symptoms of COVID-19 need to isolate regardless of vaccination status. More specifically,

- People who have a **positive viral test** for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they have **symptoms**.
- People with **symptoms** of COVID-19, including people who are awaiting test results or have not been tested. People with symptoms should isolate even if they do not know if they have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.

## How long should a student or staff member with COVID-19 isolate?

All people with COVID-19 should undergo isolation for at least 5 full days. Day 0 is the day symptoms began or the day of the positive viral test (for people with no COVID-19 symptoms).

## When can a student or staff member be around others (end isolation) after they are diagnosed with COVID-19?

Students, teachers, and staff who **test positive for COVID-19 and never develop symptoms** should isolate for at least 5 days. Day 0 is the day of the positive viral test (based on the date of testing) and day 1 is the first full day after the specimen was collected for the positive test.

- If they continue to have no symptoms, they can end isolation after at least 5 days.
- They should continue to wear a **well-fitting mask** around others at home and in public until day 10 (day 6 through day 10). If they are unable to wear a mask when around others, they should continue to isolate for 10 days.

- Avoid people who are [immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease](#), and nursing homes and other high-risk settings, until after at least 10 days.
- If they develop [symptoms](#) after testing positive, the 5-day isolation period should start over. Day 0 is the first day of symptoms. Follow the recommendations above for [ending isolation for people who had COVID-19 and had symptoms](#).
- Please visit CDC's [COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation](#) page for more specific guidance on isolation outside of the K-12 setting.

People who **have COVID-19 and have or had symptoms** should isolate for at least 5 days. To calculate the 5-day isolation period, day 0 is the first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after their symptoms developed.

- They can end isolation after 5 full days if they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and other symptoms have improved (loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation).
- They should continue to wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others at home and in public for 5 additional days (day 6 through day 10) after the end of their 5-day isolation period. If they are unable to wear a mask when around others, they should continue to isolate for 10 days.
- Avoid people who are [immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease](#), and nursing homes and other high-risk settings, until after at least 10 days.
- If they continue to have fever or other symptoms have not improved after 5 days of isolation, they should wait to end isolation until they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and their other symptoms have improved. They should continue to wear a well-fitting mask and contact their healthcare provider with questions.
- Please visit CDC's [COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation](#) page for more specific guidance on isolation outside of the K-12 setting.

**CDC continues to recommend indoor masking in K-12 schools for all individuals age 2 years and older, including students, teachers, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status.**

The school should ensure there is a plan for people ending isolation and undergoing their 5 additional days after the end of isolation to stay masked at all times indoors. During times in the school day when students or staff members may typically remove masks indoors (such as during lunches, snacks, etc.), have a plan for them to adequately distance from others and ensure they wear their masks when not actively participating in these activities (such as when they are not actively eating).

Note that these recommendations **do not** apply to people with severe COVID-19 or with weakened immune systems (immunocompromised). See CDC's [COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation](#) page recommendations for when to end isolation for these groups.

## What should a student or staff member do during isolation?

A person who was asked to isolate because they have tested positive for COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should take the following steps:

- Stay home from school and all other extra-curricular activities, as well as community events, social gatherings, etc. that take place with anyone that is not in their household.
- Monitor their [symptoms](#). If they develop an [emergency warning sign](#) seek emergency medical care immediately. Emergency warning signs include trouble breathing; persistent pain or pressure in the chest; new confusion; the inability to wake up or stay awake; and pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds (depending on skin tone).
- [Clean and disinfect](#) high touch surfaces in the area of the home where they are isolating.
- Avoid contact with other members of the household and pets by staying in a separate room and using a separate bathroom if possible.
- Avoid sharing personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils.
- [Wear a mask](#) when around other people, including around others in the household.
- CDC provides more information about what to do during isolation on its web page, [What to Do If You Are Sick](#).

# Can a student or staff member come to school while in isolation?

No. It is very important that a student or staff member not attend in-person school while in isolation. Schools should offer remote learning options for students who cannot attend in-person school or provide packets of learning materials for offline instruction. Consult with school officials about the best way for students to receive instruction and continue learning while they are in isolation.

# What activities can a student or staff member participate in while in isolation?

A student or staff member can participate in any online or virtual school activities during their isolation period, assuming they feel well enough to do so. They may be able to complete aspects of work or assignments from home during this time, depending on how well they feel. They can engage with other students, teachers, or staff through phone conversations, online meetings, or other virtual/remote engagement.

It is important for a student or staff member in isolation to remain at home, separated from other people as much as possible, even if they do not have symptoms. They should not attend in-person school or other extra-curricular or social activities while they are in isolation. They should not participate in activities like sporting events, play dates, parties, social and family gatherings, music or theater performances, and other events where they may come into contact with other people. To prevent other people from possibly getting COVID-19, make every effort to limit contact between the person in isolation and other people, including other household members, during the isolation period. Even if the person in isolation is wearing a mask, contact with other people should be limited.

## Related pages

- › [When to Isolate](#)
- › [Test for Current Infection](#)
- › [How to Protect Yourself & Others](#)
- › [COVID-19 Contact Tracing](#)
- › [What to Do If You Are Sick](#)

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