



Missouri School Reopening & Operating Guidance Frequently Asked Questions: Modified Guidance on Mask Use and Quarantine in K-12 Schools

- 1) What is the modified guidance involving mask use and quarantine in K-12 Schools?**
On November 12, 2020, the guidance related to identifying close contacts in the school setting was modified. If the person diagnosed with COVID-19 and the close contact were both wearing masks appropriately during the time of exposure in the school setting, the close contact would not need to quarantine.
- 2) Does this recommendation apply to all K-12 Schools?**
Yes, if the school has implemented a mask mandate, AND appropriate masks were being worn correctly by both individuals during the time of exposure in the school setting, the individual who came in contact with the person with COVID-19 does not have to quarantine at home.
- 3) Is a school mask mandate required?**
No, school mask mandates are not required; the decision to require masks is made at the local level by school administrators and school board officials. However, schools must have a mask mandate for the updated guidance to apply to individuals identified as close contacts to a case at school.
- 4) What if a school does not have a mask mandate?**
If the school has not implemented a mask mandate then close contacts in the school setting should continue to follow the previously established quarantine protocol, with close contacts quarantining at home for 14 days, regardless of mask use.
- 5) What is considered an appropriate mask?**
Please refer to page 7 of the [Missouri School Reopening & Operating Guidance](#).
- 6) What about other barriers such as face shields or desk shields?**
The amended guidance is specific to the use of appropriate masks. Face shields or desk shields are not substitutes for the use of appropriate masks.
- 7) Does this apply to student and teachers?**
Yes. The updated guidance includes students, teachers, and staff at K-12 schools.
- 8) What if the individual with COVID-19 is wearing a mask, but the close contacts are not?**
The updated guidance only applies if the person diagnosed with COVID-19 AND the close contact were both wearing masks appropriately during the time of exposure in the school setting. Please refer to the visual aid "[Wear a Mask. Stay in School.](#)"

- 9) If students are seated 6 feet apart in the classroom, do they still need to be masked?**
Persons seated greater than 6 feet apart would not be considered a close contact. However, there are many instances where teachers and students interact in the classroom and therefore, can result in the teacher and/or other students in the classroom meeting the criteria as a close contact and requiring quarantine. A school's mask mandate that requires appropriate mask use at all times would ensure they are in compliance with the updated guidance.
- 10) Can the individual with COVID-19 return to class early if wearing a mask?**
No. The individual with COVID-19 still must isolate and not return to school until the criteria is met for release from isolation.
- 11) Does the new guidance also apply to other settings, such as businesses?**
No. The amended guidance is specific to the K-12 school setting.
- 12) Is this implementation of this new guidance mandatory?**
The guidance establishes a minimum baseline for utilization by local public health authorities. Local public health agencies wishing to establish more stringent guidance for quarantine determinations, or follow standing CDC guidance within their jurisdiction, may choose to do so.
- 13) When does the implementation of this new guidance take effect?**
The decision regarding the timing of the implementation of the new guidance is a joint decision of the local education authorities (LEAs) and the local public health agencies (LPHAs).
- 14) Can students currently under quarantine return to school?**
Yes. If the school has a mask mandate and both the individual with COVID-19 and the exposed individual were each properly wearing an appropriate mask at the time that the quarantine determination was made, the student may return to school.
- 15) How can an LPHA verify students and staff were wearing masks appropriately when exposed?**
Mask use should be part of the standard interview process for all COVID-19 cases identified among students, teachers, and staff at K-12 schools. The findings of the investigation (duration of close contact, mask use, etc.) will determine the identification of close contacts and recommendation for quarantine.
- 16) What is included as the school setting?**
The school setting includes all classrooms, gyms, library, playgrounds, buses, etc.
- 17) What about exposures at lunch?**
It is important to continue to ask questions and assess the opportunity for exposures for all cases. If an individual at school meets the CDC definition of a close contact and either the case or the close contact were not wearing masks, then the close contact would need to quarantine. Physical distancing continues to be an important mitigation strategy for schools, especially during times when students cannot wear their masks, such as meal times.
- 18) What about exposures during recess, PE, or activities such as sports, band, on the bus, etc.?**
It is important to continue to ask questions and assess the opportunity for exposures for all cases. If an individual at school meets the CDC definition of a close contact and either the case or the close contact were not wearing masks, then the close contact would need to quarantine.

19) Are exposures that occur to students or staff wearing a mask outside of the school setting included in the updated guidance?

No. The updated guidance is specific to exposures that occur while in the school setting.

20) Are students and staff who are identified as close contacts to a case at school, but meet the modified guidance (proper masking), required to be in quarantine when not at school?

(Updated 11-19-20)

Yes. Students and school staff members identified as close contacts to a case at school should quarantine to limit potential further exposure. This modified guidance serves only to create an exception for attendance at school, but does not impact the individual's designation as a close contact. Close contacts should quarantine, except for being eligible to attend school, even when both the positive case and the close contact were properly wearing masks.

21) Can persons identified as close contacts but are not required to be quarantined, per the modified guidance, continue to participate in sports or other extracurricular school related activities?

(Updated 11-19-20)

No. This modified guidance does not authorize a close contact to participate in school-associated sports, extracurricular activities or any other activities outside of the school setting. Other than attending school, these close contacts should continue to quarantine.

22) How do we explain to the public that mask use can be used in determination of close contacts in a school setting, but not for all others outside of a school setting?

The revised guidance is limited to determinations of close contacts in school settings only. Observational analysis of 8 months of experience with this novel emerging virus have shown for this age cohort in a school setting that given the overall advantages of in person learning for children, at this time in this setting, this is a reasonable approach.

23) What data supports this modification to in the guidance?

The infectious disease doctors working with DHSS and DESE on K-12 guidance provided some references related to transmission and masks on the final page of the [Missouri School Reopening and Operating Guidance document](#).