



Bell County Public Health District
PROMOTE • PREVENT • PROTECT

Public Health Guidance for Prevention and Response to COVID-19 in Schools

*Guidelines are subject to change based on guidance from State
entities

Introduction

Bell County Public Health District (BCHD) intends this Screening Reference Guide to be a helpful tool for local education leaders across Bell County for response to suspected, presumed, or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in their schools.

Note: This document does not outline all detailed public health guidance for K-12 schools - for all public health guidance as directed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), see [Strong Start 2020-21 Guidebook for Public Health Operations](#) and [SY 20-21 Public Health Planning Guidance](#). For more information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), please see [Considerations for Schools](#). Most of the content of this document is based on CDC guidance and may differ from TEA guidance. It is at the discretion of school administrations to decide how to proceed on a case by case basis in consultation with public health.

This Screening Reference Guide outlines recommended protocols for staff to follow when responding to a positive symptom screening or report of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection. These protocols identify next steps in interacting with students or staff who have screened positive, meaning they:

- a. Share they were exposed to someone with COVID-19 (defined as having close contact of less than 6 feet distance for more than 15 minutes) but have no symptoms;
- b. Share they were diagnosed with COVID-19 less than 10 days ago but are not currently symptomatic; OR
- c. Present with at least one of the following COVID-19 symptoms, with and without laboratory-confirmation of infection:
 - i. Fever ($\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$)
 - ii. Sore throat
 - iii. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - iv. New cough
 - v. New loss of taste or smell*
 - vi. Diarrhea, vomiting, or abdominal pain
 - vii. New onset of headache

**as per CDC definition of COVID-19 related symptoms*

The following staff should adhere to protocols outlined in this Screening Reference Guide:

- All school staff who interact with students, to know what to do if students share they had an exposure or diagnosis of COVID-19, or develop COVID-19 symptoms during the day
- School nurses or delegated staff
- School staff who are responsible for cleaning, notification to WCCHD,

and/or communication to students, families, teachers, and staff, according to the protocols outlined in this guide.

DEFINING “CLOSE CONTACT”

According to guidance from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) masks or barriers should be a consideration when deciding if a person was a close contact.

The standard definition for a close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive case for 15 consecutive minutes. The CDC does not consider use of a barrier or a mask as a mitigating factor, but we at BCPHD know that this is not practical. Therefore we are issuing the following guidance to help schools assess close contact:

- Individuals within six feet of someone who is showing symptoms of COVID-19, or has tested positive for COVID-19, for at least 15 minutes, when neither person is wearing a mask,
- Individuals are masked or separated by a barrier (Plexiglas or some other barrier) and the COVID-19 infected individual has no symptoms, there was no physical contact and the time period within 6 ft was 30 consecutive minutes or less then this may not be considered an exposure.
- Individuals are masked and the COVID-19 infected individual has no symptoms, but the parties were in sustained physical contact (hand holding, hugging, huddling etc.) then this would be considered an exposure.
- Individuals are masked or separated by a barrier (Plexiglas or some other barrier) and the COVID-19 infected individual has at least 2 COVID-19 symptoms then this would be considered an exposure.

This guidance must bear two caveats in mind. Widespread infection in a school may result in closure even if all students are masked and there may be variation as to how these individual things are defined as our epidemiologists investigate each confirmed case. There will be “gray areas” so we ask that school staff exercise their best judgment in determining if someone was exposed.

**Bell County Health Authority
&
Bell County Public Health District**

School Closure Threshold Guidance

1. Closure of a school campus would take place if 2% or greater of the total campus in-person population (students and staff) have lab-confirmed COVID-19 over a period of 7 days, if deemed necessary after review and discussion with the school administration and health district. Extenuating circumstances that may preclude a complete campus closure could include overall population of campus; cohorting or self-containment of students or staff members, and the epidemiology of the specific cases.
2. Students or staff with lab-confirmed COVID-19 must be removed until they meet the criteria of a recovery per [TEA guidelines](#).
3. Contacts of a student or staff member with lab-confirmed COVID-19 would need to isolate and self-monitor per CDC guidelines and only return when they are cleared by the Bell County Public Health District.
4. In the event of a school closure, it shall be for a period of up to 5 calendar days. If significant spread within the campus is found, closure time may need be extended to prevent further transmission.
 - a. During this time the Bell County Public Health District will be responsible for contact tracing.
 - b. During this time school officials will be responsible for fully sanitizing the campus before allowing non-impacted students and staff to return to the campus.
 - c. During this time the Bell County Public Health District, the Bell County Public Health Authority, and the school will cooperate and collaborate on both these efforts.

Individuals Confirmed or Suspected with COVID-19

1. Any individuals who themselves either: (a) are lab-confirmed to have COVID-19; or (b) experience the symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) must stay at home throughout the infection period, and cannot return to campus until the school system screens the individual to determine any of the below conditions for campus re-entry have been met:
 - a. In the case of an individual who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to school when all three of the following criteria are met:
 - i. At least one day (24 hours) has passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications);
 - ii. The individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and;
 - iii. At least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
 - b. In the case of an individual who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, such individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.
 - c. If the individual has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either
 - i. Obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis or
 - ii. Obtain an acute infection test (a PCR test, not a rapid or an antibody test) at an approved testing location (<https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/>) that comes back negative for COVID-19.

SCREENING PROTOCOLS

EXPOSURE, NO SYMPTOMS: Staff or Student shares they were exposed to someone with COVID-19 within the last 2 weeks but is NOT symptomatic

Exclusion:

- ☐ Do not allow person to enter school facility
- ☐ If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately
- ☐ Person may return to school 14 days after last close contact, if no symptoms develop nor do they have a positive COVID-19 test
- ☐ If symptoms develop consistent with COVID-19 and/or the person shares a positive laboratory test result during the period of quarantine, then exclusion rules apply as to the new situation. A negative laboratory result does not change the 14-day exclusion period per this protocol for an asymptomatic person.
- ☐ Person may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out

Infection Control

- ☐ Ensure that all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors follow school district policies on the wearing of face coverings, hand hygiene, and social distancing. Encourage cloth face coverings to be worn by all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors on buses or other transportation vehicles, inside school buildings, and anywhere on school grounds, including outside
- ☐ Individuals excluded from school for exposure must continue to self-screen for symptoms and report daily according to district policies and procedures

Transportation

- ☐ Person may not utilize group transportation such as the bus until released to return to the school facility

Notification to Public

Health

- ☐ No notification actions by the School are recommended
- ☐ BCPHD may provide assistance for tracking persons excluded for exposure if warranted

Closure

- ☐ No closure actions by the School are recommended

Cleaning

- ☐ No additional cleaning actions by the School are recommended

Communication with students, families, and staff

- ☐ No communication actions by the School are recommended

POSITIVE SCREENING PROTOCOLS

DIAGNOSIS, NO SYMPTOMS: Staff or Student shares they were diagnosed with COVID-19 less than 10 days ago, but is NOT symptomatic

Exclusions

- ☐ Do not allow person to enter school facility.
- ☐ If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately.
- ☐ Person may return to school 10 days after the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test if they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test. If person develops symptoms within the 10- day isolation, go to Exclusions as per Screening Protocol for Diagnosis with Symptoms to determine exclusion period.
- ☐ Person may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out.

Infection Control

- ☐ Ensure that all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors follow school district policies on the wearing of face coverings, hand hygiene, and social distancing. Encourage cloth face coverings to be worn by all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors on buses or other transportation vehicles, inside school buildings, and anywhere on school grounds, including outside.
- ☐ Individuals excluded from school for diagnosis without symptoms must continue to self-screen for symptoms and report daily according to district policies and procedures.

Transportation

- ☐ If student, they may not utilize group transportation such as the bus until released to return to the school facility.

Notification to Public Health

- ☐ School must notify BCPHD of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case(s) among students or staff (as required by Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81).
- ☐ School must follow the directions shared by BCPHD for this particular instance, such as for contact tracing students, staff, and families, and/or specific cleaning protocols.

Closure

- ☐ Close off areas used by the sick person, do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- ☐ Consult with BCPHD as to whether closure of a classroom or entire building is recommended. There may be no need to close the school if BCPHD determines that close contacts are excluded and there is sufficient space to continue normal operations.
- ☐ BCPHD may in some situations determine that closure of a facility is to be considered. In conjunction with the TEA, the Local Health Authority may recommend school closure. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Cleaning

- ☐ If seven (7) days or less since the individual with the positive case was on campus, close off areas used by the person, including school transportation vehicles, and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- ☐ Wait at least 24 hours after the last presence of the person at the facility before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- ☐ People should not be in the classroom, room, or other area of the facility while it is being cleaned.
- ☐ Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
- ☐ Use an EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- ☐ Remember to clean items that might not ordinarily be cleaned daily such as doorknobs, light switches, countertops, chairs, cubbies, and playground structures.
- ☐ Follow CDC Guidance for Disinfecting Schools for additional cleaning and disinfection recommendations.
- ☐ For school transportation vehicles:
 - o Do not use the vehicle until after cleaning and disinfection.
 - o Wait at least 24 hours after the last presence of the person in the vehicle before cleaning and disinfecting (or if 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible).
- ☐ School must follow any other directions shared by BCPHD for this particular instance.

Communication with students, families, and staff

- ☐ Schools are recommended to notify in writing all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-

confirmed case is identified.

- o If needed, a template letter can be provided by BCPHD.
 - o The notice to staff and families must maintain confidentiality in accordance with Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81 and all other state and federal laws.
- ☐ A public health professional will contact staff and families if they are identified as a close contact to the individual who tested positive.

BCPHD Next Steps

- ☐ BCPHD will ensure the case and all close contacts as provided by the school are documented in the contact tracing system
- ☐ Public health staff will interview the person who tested positive for COVID-19 (or their family member, if it is a young child). As part of the interview, public health staff will identify additional individuals who were in close contact (defined as within 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer)
- ☐ Public health staff will attempt to reach out to close contacts and inform them that they need to quarantine at home for 14 days after their last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 and monitor themselves daily for the development of symptoms
- ☐ Public health staff will recommend the close contacts be tested to identify additional positive cases
- ☐ Public health staff will share that close contacts testing negative and remaining without symptoms will still need to complete the full original 14-day quarantine.

POSITIVE SCREENING PROTOCOLS

SYMPTOMS: Staff or Student presents with at least one of the following COVID-19 symptoms (*Fever • Sore throat • Shortness of breath • Difficulty breathing • New cough • New loss of taste or smell • Diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain • New headache*)

Exclusion

- ☐ Do not allow person to enter school facility.
- ☐ If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately.
- ☐ Person must stay home and may seek medical care.
- ☐ If diagnosed with suspected COVID-19 based on symptoms only, person may return to school when:
 - o At least 1 day (24 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; and
 - o Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
 - o At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- ☐ If they have had a negative COVID-19 test (RT-PCR, not an antigen or antibody test), person may return to school once there is no fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines and has felt well for 24 hours.
- ☐ Person can return to school, if they receive confirmation of an alternative diagnosis from a health care provider that would explain the COVID-19-like symptom(s), once there is no fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines and they have felt well for 24 hours, or person has met other routine return-to-school policies.
- ☐ Person may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out.

Infection Control

- ☐ Ensure that all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors follow school district policies on the wearing of face coverings, hand hygiene, and social distancing. Encourage cloth face coverings to be worn by all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors on buses or other transportation vehicles, inside school buildings, and anywhere on school grounds, including outside.

Transportation

- ☐ If student, they may not utilize group transportation such as the bus until released to return to the school facility.

Notification of Public Health

- ☐ School must notify BCPHD of suspect COVID-19 case(s) among students or staff (as required by Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81).
- ☐ School must follow the directions shared by BCPHD for this particular instance, such as for contact tracing students, staff, and families, and/or specific cleaning protocols.

Closure

- ☐ Close off areas used by the sick person, do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- ☐ Consult with BCPHD as to whether closure of a classroom or entire building is recommended. There may be no need to close the school if BCPHD determines that close contacts are excluded and there is sufficient space to continue normal operations.
- ☐ BCPHD may in some situations determine that closure of a facility is to be considered. In conjunction with the TEA, the Local Health Authority may recommend school closure. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Cleaning

- ☐ Close off areas used by the sick person, including school transportation vehicles, and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- ☐ Wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- ☐ People should not be in the classroom, room, or other area of the facility while it is being cleaned.
- ☐ Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
- ☐ Use an EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- ☐ Remember to clean items that might not ordinarily be cleaned daily such as doorknobs, light switches, countertops, chairs, cubbies, and playground structures.
- ☐ Follow CDC Guidance for Disinfecting Schools for additional cleaning and disinfection recommendations.

- ☐ For school transportation vehicles:
 - ☐ Do not use the vehicle until after cleaning and disinfection.
 - ☐ Wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting (or if 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible).
- ☐ School must follow any other directions shared by BCPHD for this particular instance.

Communication with students, families, and staff

- ☐ Schools must coordinate with BCPHD to determine how to inform families and staff as appropriate - they may not necessarily need to be notified, depending on the situation. The notice to staff and families must maintain confidentiality in accordance with Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81 and all other state and federal laws.

POSITIVE SCREENING PROTOCOLS

DIAGNOSIS, WITH SYMPTOMS: Staff or Student shares they were diagnosed with COVID-19 less than 10 days ago and IS symptomatic with one or more of the following (*Fever • Sore throat • Shortness of breath • Difficulty breathing • New cough • New loss of taste or smell • Diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain • New headache*)

Exclusion

- ☐ Do not allow person to enter school facility.
- ☐ If staff, supervisor must be notified immediately.
- ☐ Person must stay home and may seek medical care.
- ☐ If diagnosed with confirmed COVID-19 based on laboratory testing, person may return to school when:
 - ☐ At least 1 day (24 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; and
 - ☐ Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
 - ☐ At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- ☐ Person may participate in remote learning and teaching (if applicable) while out.

Infection Control

- ☐ Ensure that all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors follow school district policies on the wearing of face coverings, hand hygiene, and social distancing. Encourage cloth face coverings to be worn by all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and all teachers, staff and adult visitors on buses or other transportation vehicles, inside school buildings, and anywhere on school grounds, including outside.

Transportation

- ☐ Student may not utilize group transportation such as the bus until released to return to the school facility.

Notification to Public Health

- ☐ School must notify BCPHD of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case(s) among students or staff (as required by Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81).

- ☐ School must follow the directions shared by BCPHD for this particular instance, such as for contact tracing students, staff, and families, and/or specific cleaning protocols.

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- ☐ BCPHD may in some situations determine that closure of a facility is to be considered. In conjunction with the TEA, the Local Health Authority may recommend school closure. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Cleaning

- ☐ If seven (7) days or less since the individual with the positive case was on campus, close off areas used by the person, including school transportation vehicles, and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- ☐ Wait at least 24 hours after the last presence of the person at the facility before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- ☐ People should not be in the classroom, room, or other area of the facility while it is being cleaned.
- ☐ Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
- ☐ Use an EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- ☐ Remember to clean items that might not ordinarily be cleaned daily such as doorknobs, light switches, countertops, chairs, cubbies, and playground structures.
- ☐ Follow CDC Guidance for Disinfecting Schools for additional cleaning and disinfection recommendations.
- ☐ For school transportation vehicles:
 - ☐ Do not use the vehicle until after cleaning and disinfection.
 - ☐ Wait at least 24 hours after the last presence of the person in the vehicle before cleaning and disinfecting (or if 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible).
- ☐ School must follow any other directions shared by BCPHD for this particular

instance.

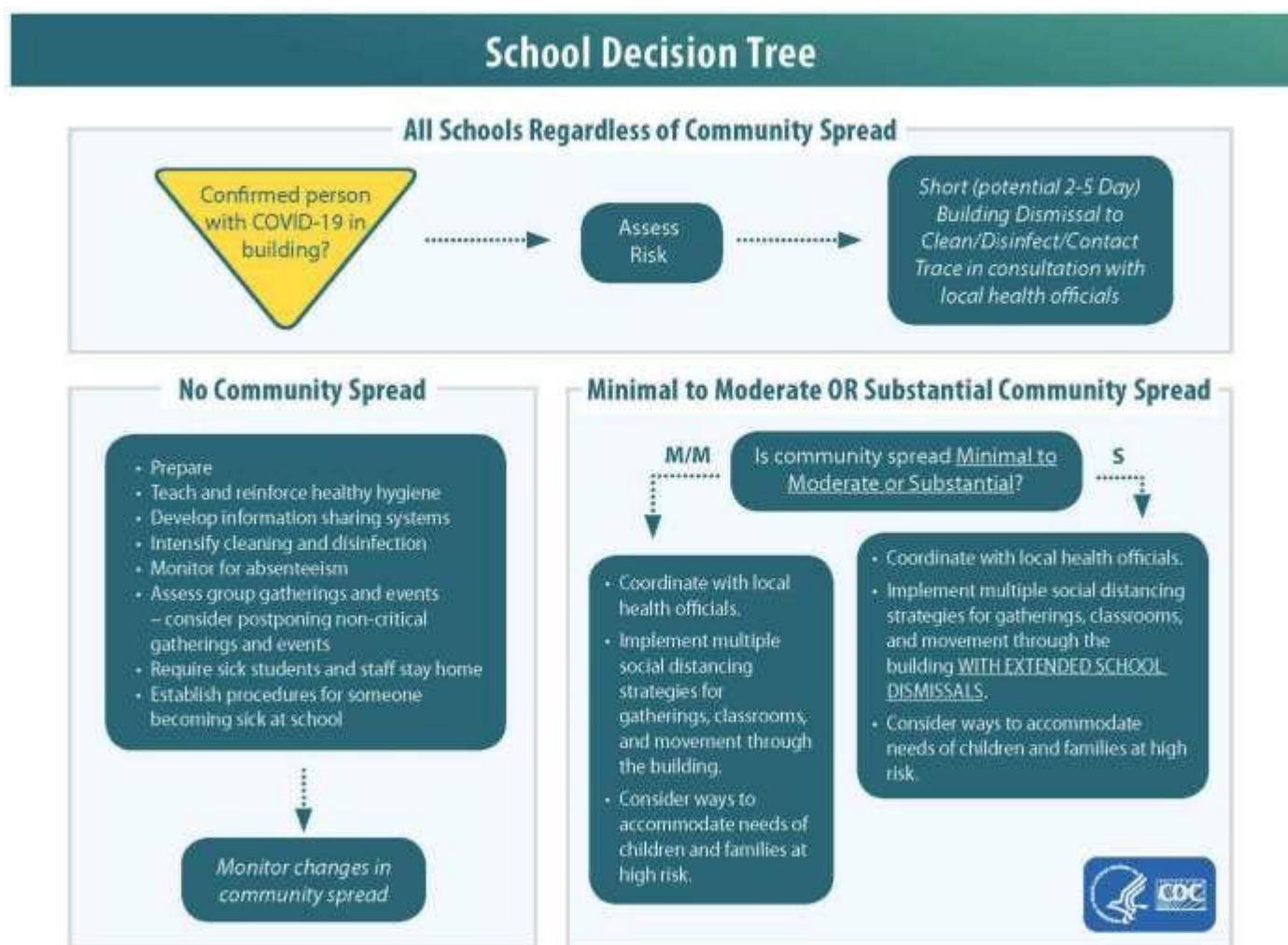
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- ☐ Schools are recommended to notify in writing all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-confirmed case is identified.
 - ☐ If needed, a template letter can be provided by BCPHD.
 - ☐ The notice to staff and families must maintain confidentiality in accordance with Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 81 and all other state and federal laws.
- ☐ A public health professional will contact staff and families if they are identified as a close contact to the individual who tested positive.

BCPHD Next Steps

- ☐ BCPHD will ensure the case and all close contacts as provided by the school are documented in the contact tracing system.
- ☐ Public health staff will interview the person who tested positive for COVID-19 (or their family member, if it is a young child). As part of the interview, public health staff will identify additional individuals who were in close contact (defined as within 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer).
- ☐ Public health staff will attempt to reach out to close contacts and inform them that they need to quarantine at home for 14 days after their last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 and monitor themselves daily for the development of symptoms.
- ☐ Public health staff will recommend the close contacts be tested to identify additional positive cases.
- ☐ Public health staff will share that close contacts testing negative and remaining without symptoms will still need to complete the full original 14-day quarantine.

APPENDICES



Any decision about school dismissal or cancellation of school events should be made in coordination with your local health officials. Schools are not expected to make decisions about dismissals on their own.

BCPHD will consider COVID-19 case burden, absenteeism among staff and students and Influenza-like illness/COVID-like illness reported at a school when making recommendations to close.

You may need to temporarily dismiss school for up to 5 days, if a student or staff member attended school before being confirmed as having COVID-19. This initial short-term dismissal allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the school and for custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facilities. Work with the local health officials to determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended dismissal duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.

If there is substantial transmission in the local community, [local health officials may suggest extended school dismissals](#) (e.g., dismissals for longer than two weeks). This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, dismissal strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community.

Protect Your School against COVID-19

- ✓ **Always wear gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE)** appropriate for the chemicals being used.
- ✓ **Cleaning and disinfection products should not be used by or near students.**
- ✓ **Make sure that there is adequate ventilation (air flow) when using chemical products** to prevent yourself or others from inhaling toxic fumes.



Use an EPA-approved disinfectant against COVID-19. Visit [epa.gov/listn](https://www.epa.gov/listn) or scan the QR code with your smart phone to check EPA's list of approved disinfectants.



Always follow the directions on the label. Check “use sites” and “surface types” to find out where the product can be used. Pay close attention to “precautionary statements.”



Clean surfaces and determine how areas will be disinfected. Clean surfaces with soap and water prior to disinfection. Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily.



Follow the specified contact time. Apply the product (e.g., spray or wipe a surface) and allow it to dry according to the specified contact time on the label.



5 Wear gloves and wash your hands with soap and water. Discard disposable gloves after each cleaning and disinfection. For reusable gloves, dedicate a pair to disinfecting surfaces to prevent the spread of COVID-19. After removing gloves, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



Store chemicals in a secure location. Keep product lids closed tightly and store products in a location away from students' reach and sight.

The Difference Between Cleaning and Disinfecting

- ✓ **Cleaning** reduces germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects and works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces.
 - Cleaning of surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses.
- ✓ **Disinfecting** kills (or inactivates) germs on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works best by using chemicals, as directed, on surfaces after they've been properly cleaned.

Which Disinfectant Products Should I Use?

You can use any EPA-approved disinfectant against COVID-19. Visit [epa.gov/listn](https://www.epa.gov/listn) or scan the QR code with your smart phone to check EPA's list of approved disinfectants.



Where Should I Clean and Disinfect?

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects within the classroom. Check compatibility for products for use on electronic devices.

Consider cleaning surfaces and object including but not limited to:

- ☐ Door handles and knobs
- ☐ Desks and chairs
- ☐ Cabinets, lockers, and bookshelves
- ☐ Shared computer keyboards and mice
- ☐ Light switches
- ☐ Pencil sharpener handles
- ☐ Sinks and surrounding areas
- ☐ Countertops
- ☐ Shared electronics such as printers
- ☐ Other shared learning materials

When Should I Clean and Disinfect?

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily or between use by different students.

Limit the use of shared objects when possible, or clean and disinfect between use.

Options for cleaning and disinfection include:

- ☐ In the morning before students arrive
- ☐ Between classes (if students change rooms and while students are not present)
- ☐ Between use of shared surfaces or objects
- ☐ Before and after food service
- ☐ Before students return from recess or breaks
- ☐ After students leave for the day



Store cleaning and disinfection products out of the reach of students. Cleaning and disinfection products should not be used by or near students, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic fumes.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)