



Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.
STATE HEALTH OFFICER

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Dear School Officials:

The 2021-2022 academic year has begun for many school districts. Alabama is experiencing a tremendous spike in COVID-19 cases and the Delta variant is more contagious. Due to the overwhelming number of positive cases for COVID-19, it is imperative that school districts take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccine remains the most effective way to stop the spread of disease; however, the COVID-19 vaccine is not available for children under 12 years of age.

The state of Alabama is at a critical juncture and community transmission of COVID-19 is high throughout the state. The Alabama Department of Public Health is receiving numerous complaints on a daily basis from concerned medical professionals and parents of school-aged children concerning COVID-19 positive individuals who continue to attend school.

COVID-19 is an infectious disease and any individual that tests positive or is reported to the Alabama Department of Public Health as suspected of having COVID-19, is required to isolate for 10 days. In addition, the Alabama Department of Public Health is receiving reports about close contacts that are not quarantining. Any close contact that does not meet an exception to quarantine, should quarantine for 10-14 days to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Exceptions to quarantine include asymptomatic fully-vaccinated close contacts, asymptomatic close contacts that have tested positive 3 months prior to exposure that have fully recovered; and the K-12 in-class student exception that is included in the Alabama Department of Public Health's Back to School Guidance 2021-2022.

To protect the public's health and to limit the further spread of COVID-19, possible deaths, and school closures, the Alabama Department of Public Health strongly recommends that schools implement measures to protect students, teachers, school staff, and their families.

Sincerely,

Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.
State Health Officer

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K-12 BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDANCE 2021-2022

People with COVID-19 may experience mild, severe, or no symptoms. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:

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

Immediate emergency medical care is needed for the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

Notify Close Contacts of Exposure: (Attachment F)

- School officials should notify individuals who are close contacts to a diagnosed COVID-19 case as soon as possible. This exposure notification is necessary to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in schools (see Attachment F).
- The CDC definition of a close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) 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). An infected person can spread SARS-CoV-2 starting from 2 days before they have any symptoms (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days before the positive specimen collection date), until they meet the criteria for discontinuing home isolation.
- In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition *excludes* students who were 3 feet or more (but within 6 feet) of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if:
 - both students were engaged in the consistent and correct use of well-fitted masks; and
 - other K-12 school prevention strategies (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the K-12 school setting.