Portage Area School District

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Background

The school district has received numerous questions from students, parents, and staff about a positive test result for COVID-19 and/or contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus.

On May 10th, 2021, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) updated COVID-19 Patient Instructions for Self-Isolation while awaiting Laboratory Results. On July 30th, 2021, the PADOH released additional updated guidance for Testing, Isolation, and Quarantine by vaccination status. This official document is available on the school district's home page.

In an effort to explain these health alerts to the public, we are providing this FAQ of the procedure students, staff, and the school district will follow in the event someone either has the virus or has been exposed to the virus.

The latest additions to the FAQ are shown in RED.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness.
- These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus:
    - One or more:
        - Cough
        - Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing
        - Loss of taste or smell
    - Two or more:
        - Temperature/Fever
        - Chills
        - Fatigue
        - Muscle or body aches
        - Sore throat
        - Congestion or runny nose
        - Nausea or vomiting
        - Diarrhea

I think I might have COVID-19, what should I do?

- For individuals showing signs of COVID-19 virus
    - Regardless of vaccination status, self-isolate in your home.
    - Avoid the school setting until seen by primary care physician or a negative COVID-19 test result.
    - If living with others, self-isolate in a private room and use a private bathroom if possible.
    - Make a list of close contacts from two days before symptoms developed.
    - Interact with others as little as possible.
    - Wear a tight-fitting mask if around others.

What do I do if I was sent home from school with symptoms of COVID-19?

- The school district suggests avoiding the school setting until seen by primary care physician or a negative COVID-19 test result is obtained.
- An excuse from the doctor or negative test result are recommended to return to school.

Do I have to be tested before I can return to school?

- The school district recognizes the symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to many other illnesses.
- It is ultimately a personal decision to be tested.
- For the protection of others, the district encourages individuals with symptoms to be tested before returning to the school.
  - Stopping the spread of the virus within our schools only happens through the cooperation of everyone.
  - Testing can help keep avoid closure of classrooms and extra-curriculars.

Do I have to be vaccinated, or, should I be vaccinated?

- According to the CDC, COVID-19 vaccines are effective at helping protect against severe disease and death from variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 currently circulating, including the Delta variant.
- The decision to be vaccinated is a personal choice.
- The vaccine is not currently required by the school district, State, or Federal government.
- Different scenarios occur for quarantine based on vaccination status
  - Quarantine requirements are controlled by State and Federal mandates, not the school district.
  - Please review this entire FAQ

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

- **Isolation** is used to separate people infected with COVID-19 from those who are not infected.
  - People who are in isolation should stay home until it's safe for them to be around others. At home, anyone sick or infected should separate from others, stay in a specific "sick room" or area, and use a separate bathroom (if available).
- **Quarantine** is used for someone who has been in close contact (within 6 feet of someone for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period) with someone who has COVID-19, unless fully vaccinated.
  - People who are fully vaccinated do NOT need to quarantine after contact with someone who had COVID-19 unless they have symptoms.
  - However, fully vaccinated people should get tested 3-5 days after their exposure, even if they don't have symptoms and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.

I tested positive for COVID-19, now what?

- For individuals with a positive test result regardless of vaccination status:
    - Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate.
    - This individual may or may not develop illness.
        1. If symptoms occur, self-isolate in the home until the following conditions are met:
            - It has been at least ten days since symptoms first appeared, <u>AND</u>
            - It has been at least one day since having a fever without using fever-reducing medications, <u>AND</u>
            - Respiratory symptoms are improving (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).
        2. If symptoms do not develop, self-isolate in the home until it has been at least ten days since the day test specimen was collected.
        3. Some people with severe illness or who are severely immunocompromised may need to isolate for 20 days or more after symptom onset.
        4. If symptoms get worse or if you require hospitalization, notify your healthcare provider immediately.
- <u>Re-testing cannot be used to reduce the length of isolation.</u>

I might have been exposed to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, am I a "close contact"?

Close Contacts Definition:

- Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period 2 days before the infected person had any symptoms
    - In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student if ***both*** the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.
    - This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.
- CDC Decision Tree for identifying close contacts in K-12 Indoor classroom setting

As a close contact, can an antibody test be used to avoid, or be released, from quarantine?

- If a person was exposed right now, got a positive antibody test this evening, the individual would not be required to quarantine. Instead, they'd have to wear a face covering and monitor symptoms the next 14 days.
- Or, if a person had an antibody test within the past seven days but was exposed right now, their antibody test will release the individual from quarantine but they'd have to wear a face covering and monitor symptoms for 14 days from exposure.
- In general, there is nothing to be gained from a positive antibody test ahead of time to avoid quarantine as PA DOH have deemed schools high risk settings based on a county's Level of Community Transmission
- If an individual has a negative antibody test after being deemed a close contact, the person would have to quarantine.

Must I quarantine as a close contact if I had a <u>confirmed</u> (medical documentation required) case of COVID-19 within the past 3 months?

- Quarantine, or being tested again, is not required as long as symptoms do not develop.
- Masking for 14 days is still required.
- If symptoms develop, the individual should isolate and seek testing

What if I'm a close contact of someone outside my household with suspected or confirmed COVID-19

- For individuals deemed a close contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19, several factors come into play:
    - Vaccinated with no symptoms
        1. Wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days <u>or</u> until a negative test result 2-5 days following close contact is received.
        2. Recommended - be tested 2-5 days following close contact.
        3. Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure regardless of negative test results.
    - Vaccinated with symptoms
        1. Refer to "**I think I might have COVID-19, what should I do?**" section of this FAQ
    - Previous confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 3 months
        1. Quarantine or being tested again is not required as long as symptoms do not develop.
        2. Masking for 14 days is still required for unvaccinated persons.
        3. If symptoms develop, isolate and seek testing
    - Unvaccinated
        1. Immediately quarantine.
        2. Symptoms may or may not develop.
        3. The most protective recommended quarantine period remains at 14 days after the date of last exposure (Day 0) to a person who is infectious with SARS-CoV-2.
            - The following are options to shorten the 14-day quarantine:
                - Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing <u>AND</u> if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring.
                    - Symptom monitoring continues through Day 14.
                - Quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative <u>AND</u> if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring.
                - In order to discontinue quarantine after Day 7, specimens must be collected on or after Day 5.
                    - The specimen must be collected and tested within 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation (e.g., in anticipation of testing delays), but quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.
                - Persons can discontinue quarantine at these time points only if the following criteria are also met:
                    - No clinical evidence of COVID-19 has been elicited by daily symptom monitoring during the entirety of quarantine up to the time at which quarantine is discontinued; <u>AND</u>,
                    - Daily symptom monitoring continues through quarantine Day 14; <u>AND</u>,
                    - Persons need to adhere strictly to all recommended nonpharmaceutical interventions (e.g., masking, physical distancing) through Day 14 after exposure.

What if someone living in my household tests positive for COVID-19?

- Vaccinated with no symptoms
    - Fully vaccinated members of the household do not have to quarantine.
    - Must wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days
    - Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days.
        - If symptoms develop, isolate and seek testing.
- Vaccinated with symptoms
    - Refer to "**I think I might have COVID-19, what should I do?**" section of this FAQ
- Previous confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 3 months
    - Quarantine or being tested again is not required as long as symptoms do not develop.
    - Wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days.
    - Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days.
        - If symptoms develop, isolate and seek testing.
- Unvaccinated
    - Immediately quarantine.
    - The quarantine for family members who cannot separate from the infected person <u>BEGINS</u> after the isolation period ends for the infected person.
        - If others in the household do not develop symptoms, quarantine can be as short as 17 days with a negative test or 20-24 days if no testing is performed.
            - The quarantine is extended for family members who cannot separate from the infected person.
            - The extended quarantine <u>BEGINS</u> after the isolation period ends for the infected person.
            - The extended quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing <u>AND</u> if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring.
                - Symptom monitoring continues through Day 14.
            - The extended quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative <u>AND</u> if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring.
                - In order to discontinue the extended quarantine after Day 7, specimens must be collected on or after Day 5.
                    - The specimen must be collected and tested within 48 hours before the time of planned extended quarantine discontinuation, but the extended quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.
                    - Persons can discontinue the extended quarantine at these time points only if the following criteria are also met:
                        - No clinical evidence of COVID-19 has been elicited by daily symptom monitoring during the entirety of extended quarantine up to the time at which extended quarantine is discontinued; <u>AND</u>,
                        - Daily symptom monitoring continues through extended quarantine Day 14; <u>AND</u>,
                    - Persons need to adhere strictly to all recommended nonpharmaceutical interventions (e.g., masking, physical distancing) through Day 14 after exposure
    - If others in the household do develop symptoms, the quarantine for family members who cannot separate from the infected person <u>BEGINS</u> after the isolation period ends for the other infected family member.

What does symptom monitoring mean?

- According to the CDC, persons who have been exposed to an individual with COVID-19 should self-monitor for the following symptoms twice a day for 14 days from the close contact:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Diarrhea
  - Chills
  - Repeated shaking with chills
  - Muscle pain
  - Headache
  - Sore throat
  - New loss of taste or smell
- If symptoms occur at any point during the 14-day period, the person should be seen by primary care physician.
- If symptoms occur at any point during the 14-day period, COVID-19 testing may be in order.

What if my test to reduce the length of my quarantine comes back positive?

- You will need to follow the procedures for a positive test
- Refer to "**I tested positive for COVID-19, now what?**" section of this FAQ

What do I do if I'm confused, or, this document doesn't address my specific issue?

- For more information, visit https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx
- Call the PA DOH hotline at 1-877-724-3258