

COVID 19 SCREENING AND TESTING

It is imperative that school health-safety plans have the capacity to conduct daily temperature checks, and to perform school-site testing and to provide safe quarantining for minor students and school staff with COVID 19 symptoms until they can be removed from campus. While temperature screening does not detect individuals who are asymptomatic, it is still an essential component of any school-based health-safety plan.

Screening begins at home.

Critical to effective screening is involving parents and the community in the process, as effective screening begins at home. This is in many ways the first line of defense in the battle to contain the virus. Some suggested guidelines are as follows:

- Creating school Health-Safety Teams (HST) comprised of parent and community representatives, led by a medical professional in direct contact with appropriate public health departments and medical facilities.
- Establish a Telehealth connection with local health care providers to give schools and patients access to health care professionals, expertise and guidance, quickly and efficiently.
- Educate staff and families about when they/their child(ren) should stay home and when they can return to school. The [CDC's "Consideration for Schools" guidelines](#) are a good resource for school health-safety.
- Disseminate information and provide guidance to parents and the community about steps that must be taken to reduce infections.
- Post alerts on social media and signs (posters, flyers, graphics) in strategic places at the school facility and other public places. Clearly state details of symptoms and instructions for students, parents and staff.
- Advise parents (including via text or robocall) to regularly check their children's temperature and encourage them to instruct their children to put on a cloth face covering, regardless of symptoms, before leaving their home. Provide families in need with equipment and guidance for monitoring children's temperature.
- Instruct parents to immediately notify the school if their child has a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 (including cough or shortness of breath, sore throat, or systemic symptoms like myalgias or chills) They should immediately contact their health care provider or be

- connected to one through the school. **Under no circumstances should they come to the school campus.**
- Instruct parents to immediately notify the school if a non-student member of their family tests positive (parent sibling, grandparent).
- Community organizations where children congregate (Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, Park District programs, faith based institutions, etc.) should also be part of the school-supported temperature checking and screening process.
- The cardinal rule is **staff and students should stay home** if they have tested positive for or are showing **COVID-19 symptoms**. Staff and students who have recently **been in contact** with a person with COVID-19 should also **stay home and monitor their health**.

Temperature checking and screening

Every school should have the capacity to conduct large scale temperature checks and protocols for immediately separating students who have elevated temperatures and ensuring that they are tested for the coronavirus. Some suggested guidelines are as follow:

- Onsite HST led by a school-based health care professional (school nurse) to supervise temperature checks or COVID testing on duty at all times.
- The best practice is to use equipment that requires no direct contact between the temperature-taker and students, school staff and their family members.
- Temperature screening devices (**scanners**) that can measure temperature remotely are ideal because they minimize contact, are mobile and can be positioned at school entrances like metal detectors.
- Scanners can have a high degree of accuracy – temperatures can be taken and the results provided in seconds.
- Scanners can come in the form of a temperature check tablet or a kiosk. The latter can be set up (similar to a metal detector) at each entrance. The instruments themselves can be installed and maintained by the provider in a form of a lease-service arrangement.
- There are custom health-screening tablets and kiosks with technology that can be tailored to synch with student and staff ID cards, facial recognition (even when wearing a small mask) passcode, QR (bar code) to ensure authorized access to the school.

- Custom kiosks exist that also give verbal instructions, connect to school networks, and can be mounted on a floor stand, wall, or counter for easy access.
- Scanners can be incorporated into the school safety plan and monitored by school security, much like they do with metal detectors. Some systems boast the additional security ability to control a door or gate automatically if the health screening, temperature and/or relevant passcodes are unacceptable.
- If schools have issues securing scanners, thermometers, oral or other types, can be a substitute but for more limited temperature as such scanning methods can be more time consuming and labor intensive.
- Thermometers must be thoroughly cleaned between each patient. If no directions are available for cleaning, rinse the tip of the thermometer in cold water, clean it with alcohol or alcohol swabs, and then rinse it again before next use.
- If you are using a temperature measurement that requires contact between the temperature-taker and the employees, the temperature-taker should be equipped with adequate personal protective equipment to ensure safety for both parties.
- The temperature-taker should be provided with gloves, goggles, face masks, and gowns. If the temperature taker is not using a “touch-less” system, he or she should change gloves with each scan.
- Onsite HST and/or school-based health care providers (school nurse) trained to conduct a temperature check or a COVID test should be on duty at all times the building is occupied, as reasonable.
- Students and/or staff with sudden onset symptoms must immediately be placed in separate isolated area until they can safely depart the premises.
- PPE must be kept stocked on campus, even on non-testing days, in the eventuality that sudden onset cases develop during business hours and a minor student needs supervision until a parent or guardian can pick them up.
- Students and staff who exhibit COVID 19 symptoms, and their family members, should be provided free testing services, as should their family members and should assist in contact tracing.

School-based COVID Testing and Tracking

Schools should build the capacity to conduct site-based testing for students, staff and their families. Schools should also have the capacity to assist public health agencies in “contact tracing.” A suggested testing approach is as follows:

- Schools should have the capacity to test all students and staff before the start of the school year, those who join the school during the year, and those who fail the temperature screening.
- Faculty and staff should be tested first, followed by testing of students, with optional school-based testing offered to family members, if capacity exists.
- Request parents to sign a permission slip at the beginning of the year allowing reasonable temperature taking and testing.
- Negative results communicated electronically; positive results communicated directly.
- The schools should assist the appropriate health care providers with contact tracing for school staff and students who test positive.
- Principals should prepare schedules for testing conducting tests by classroom (elementary) and by homeroom (high school).
- K-12 can test two grades each day, while high schools can test two grades each week.
- Testing should be outdoors, weather permitting. When testing indoors, the testing area should be isolated and out of the flow of school foot-traffic. No one should be permitted to enter other than those being tested or working the testing site.
- Limit the number of people to be tested during any period based on medical advice.
- Keep test-takers safely separated.
- Those testing positive must enter a two-week quarantine (or longer as determined by local health care professionals).
- Individuals must be re-tested and test negative in accordance to medical guidelines before returning. There should be ongoing monitoring.

The nonprofit, Community Organized Relief Effort (“[CORE](#)”), designed a testing process that delivers safe and high quality tests. The model presented is designed to accommodate 200 tests per day. ([CORE COVID 19 Testing Model](#))

Just as building an effective Remote Learning Platform will have direct long-term academic and social-emotional benefits long after a vaccine is found and scaled, so will the construction of a comprehensive system for effective health screening, testing, quarantining and contact tracing, as well as public health care education. This will bring long term benefits in the form of improved health for children and their families and reducing health care costs. See my [guide for re-opening schools](#) safely here.