

Frequently Asked Question about Reopening of Schools

Decision to Re-open

Who oversees the opening and closing of schools? Or in some cases postponing the opening of schools?

DSHS does not have the authority to close or open schools. Those decisions are made by the local government and the Independent School Districts. The State and Local Health Departments will provide public health recommendations to independent school districts and local government about COVID-19 transmission in their community.

The Role of Texas Department of State Health Services

Opening and closing schools in the event of COVID-19 transmission in schools?

DSHS is not to determine the opening and closing of schools but to provide public health guidance in the event of a COVID-19 positive individual being identified.

What information will DSHS provide that will help ISDs and Local Governments make informed decisions on the safety of schools?

DSHS will provide information about the current outbreak and community spread. DSHS can provide updates on measures of disease frequency in the community. More specifically, the incidence of COVID-19 in schools compared to the incidence of COVID-19 in the community. Incidence can be used to compare the risk of disease transmission at school to what might be expected outside the school campus.

Where do I go for the most up-to-date information on COVID-19?

<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Response to COVID-19 in Schools

Do schools need to report confirmed positive COVID-19 cases to their Local Health Departments (LHDs)?

Yes. Similarly to influenza outbreaks the school nurse will fill out a general disease reporting form. Once completed this form will need to be faxed to the corresponding public health agency in the individual's county of residence.

Note: in some counties, the LHD may have a different reporting process.

Will schools need to complete contact tracing?

The contact tracing will be led by Public Health investigators. However, in the event of a positive case, a letter template will be sent to the school nurse which could be used to notify classmates and staff of a potential exposure. Contact tracing will consist of the information gathered by the Nurse and from interviewing the parent or guardian. For PHR 2-3 counties, under our jurisdiction, the individuals will also be entered Texas Health Trace. For more information on Texas Health Trace please visit: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/tracing.aspx>

What guidance should schools consider when reopening?

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has updated guidance on re-opening of schools. TEA is the main source pertaining school reopening and are actively working to reform guidance as the public health situation changes.

To find their guidance visit: tea.texas.gov/coronavirus

If a parent calls to report a positive COVID-19 case?

When a parent states their child has COVID-19 the student should be treated as a probable case and reported to the LHD of jurisdiction, or public health region, as applicable. However, reporting these cases is generally a responsibility of the nurse or ISD. Once the case is reported by the school, the documentation and medical records reported later by the laboratory or health care provider might confirm a positive case. DSHS recommends responding to these cases as positives while awaiting lab results because the delay between receiving lab reports should not cause a delay of public health interventions (such as sanitizing the facility and quarantine of close contacts).

Will schools and ISD need to have medical records to report or confirm a parent or guardian calling in their child's positive result?

Schools should not expect to have access to patient medical records and or lab results. This information is protected health information under HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). Although the laboratory and Health Care Provider are both obligated to report these results to the health department, there may be a delay in receiving these results at the health department. Public health interventions (such as sanitizing the facility and quarantine of close contacts) should not be delayed while awaiting confirmatory records or lab reports.

How long must students be excluded from school when they are COVID-19 positive? And what about their contacts?

Parents and Guardians should be asked to help the child isolate at home for 10 days at minimum (no student with confirmed COVID-19 will return before 10 days have passed since symptom onset). Also, the student must be 24 hours fever-free (without the use of fever reducing medications). This 24 hours of no fever can fall within the 10 days or may come after. If the resolution of fever comes after the 10 days, then the student may be absent for more than 10 days.

If the student has a severe condition requiring hospitalization or is immunosuppressed, this isolation period may be extended by way of the a child's physician. An estimate for a student with a severe illness is approximately 20 days before return.

If you choose to seek guidance from TEA they state that you "may" choose to quarantine close contacts for 14 days. The alternative is 14-day self-monitoring. This is at the discretion of the ISD and Local Government.

OR

If you are seeking Public Health Guidance regarding exclusion/quarantine of students and staff exposed (but without symptoms or confirmed COVID-19 test) to a COVID-19 positive individual, DSHS in accordance with Centers of Disease Control (CDC) recommends the 14-day quarantine of exposed individuals based on the most recent knowledge about transmission of COVID-19.



Infectious Disease Report

Form is published at
<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/investigation/conditions/>

General Instructions

This form may be used to **report suspected cases and cases of notifiable conditions** in Texas, listed with their reporting timeframes on the current *Texas Notifiable Conditions List* available at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/investigation/conditions/>. In addition to specified reportable conditions, **any outbreak, exotic disease, or unusual group expression of disease that may be of public health concern should be reported by the most expeditious means available.** A health department epidemiologist may contact you to further investigate this Infectious Disease Report.

Suspected cases and cases should be reported to your local or regional health department.



Contact information for your local or regional health department can be found at:
<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/investigation/conditions/contacts/>

Public Health Region 2/3 Fax: 817-264-4557 OR 817-264-4910

As needed, cases may be reported to the Department of State Health Services Public Health Region 2/3 by calling 817-822-6786

Disease or Condition		Date: _____ (Check type) <small>(Please fill in onset or closest known date)</small>		<input type="checkbox"/> Onset	<input type="checkbox"/> Specimen collection
Practitioner Name		Practitioner Address/ <input type="checkbox"/> See Facility address below		Practitioner Phone/ <input type="checkbox"/> See Facility phone below (____) _____ - _____	
Diagnostic Criteria (Diagnostic Lab Test Type, Result, and Specimen Source if applicable and/or Clinical Indicators)					
Patient: Name (Last)		(First)	(MI)	Phone Number: (____) _____ - _____	
Address (Street)		City	State	Zip Code	County
Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)	Age	Sex <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	Ethnicity <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic	Race <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	
<i>Notes, comments, additional information such as other lab tests/results, clinical info, pregnancy status, occupation (food handler), school name/grade, travel history</i>					
Name of Reporting Facility			Address		
Name of Person Reporting		Title	Phone Number (____) _____ - _____ extension _____		
Date of Report (mm/dd/yyyy)		E-mail			
Health Department (local, regional, or state) use only					
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirmed <input type="checkbox"/> Probable <input type="checkbox"/> Suspected <input type="checkbox"/> Dropped <input type="checkbox"/> Duplicate, with new information					

