

Frequently Asked Questions – COVID 19 and Schools
From the Gallatin City County Health Department

What can families and staff do to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the school setting?

There are a number of actions we can all take every day to reduce the risk of catching the disease or spreading it to others. First, we need all families to monitor for COVID-19 symptoms every day and keep students home if they are sick. As part of your morning routine, ask your child about whether they are experiencing any of the [common symptoms listed by the CDC listed below](#). Conduct a temperature check prior to leaving for school. Students and staff should not come to school if they are feeling ill.

The following checklist includes symptoms to watch for and consult your health care provider about:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- New loss of taste or smell
- New runny nose or congestion
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Sore throat

This list is subject to change as new symptoms of COVID-19 are identified. Students with symptoms should not attend school and parents should consult their healthcare provider regarding their return to school.

It is important to note that not all students with COVID-19 will show clear symptoms, and not all students with symptoms have COVID-19. This is one of the reasons the disease is so difficult to contain, and also why it is important that we all continue to take other precautions.

Those additional precautions that we need all staff and students to practice includes washing their hands frequently and thoroughly and to avoid touching their face. Simple hand soap can render the virus harmless if a person washes thoroughly.

We also need students and staff to comply with social distancing procedures and local public health rules requiring use of face covering inside schools. Face coverings are required in school and on the playground at Anderson schools.

While social distancing inside a school will be challenging and imperfect, efforts to do so are designed to limit the number of students or staff exposed if someone inside the school becomes ill with COVID-19. Our shared willingness to make these social distancing measures effective will have a direct impact on the need to isolate or quarantine students or staff if the disease is detected inside the school.

What happens if someone gets sick in school?

Staff and kids with symptoms will be separated from well students using a designated isolation area. Parent/guardian emergency contact will be contacted and are expected to pick up their child promptly.

It will be important to have updated local contacts listed with the school so that your child can be picked up if necessary.

Individuals with COVID-19 signs or symptoms will be referred to a healthcare provider for evaluation on whether testing is needed.

What symptoms should require a student or staff to be sent home?

If someone has a fever of 100.4 or higher, a dry and persistent cough, shortness of breath or other symptoms identified by the CDC, schools staff should call parents to take the child home.

Many children who test positive for COVID-19 have very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. It is also important to remember that some children will become ill from influenza, strep, the common cold, or a host of other causes. This will make the coming school year difficult and stressful for some families.

It is crucial to remember: Not everyone with symptoms has COVID and not everyone with COVID has obvious symptoms. This is another reason that diligent social distancing, hand washing, and surface disinfection are important.

What happens when someone who is diagnosed with COVID-19 is inside a school building?

In most instances, a single case of COVID-19 in a school would not warrant closing the entire school. Community spread and how much contact the person with COVID-19 had with others, as well as when such contact took place, will be considered.

These variables will also be considered when determining how long a school, or part of the school, stays closed if closure is necessary. If the spread of COVID-19 within a school is higher than in the community, or if the school is the source of an outbreak, administrators will work with local health officials to determine if temporarily closing the school building is necessary.

When a case is identified, Gallatin City-County Health Department (GCCHD) will work with schools staff to assess exposure (who the person had contact with, for how long, and in what context). The health department and schools staff will communicate to parents when a case is detected in a school, and will work to identify other students or staff who may be close contacts with the known case. (The current definition of a close contact is a person who has been within 6 feet of another person for 15 minutes or more.)

In assessing exposure and identifying close contacts, public health nurses will take into account with whom the case patient had close contact. If available they will assess seating charts and take into consideration the ages of students involved and the systems set up in the school to minimize disease transmission.

If a student or staff member is identified as a close contact with someone who has COVID-19, health department nurses or staff will contact those staff members or the parents/guardians of children involved. Health department nurses will work with families to help them understand their exposure, possible symptoms to monitor, and possible referrals to health care providers to assess symptoms and determine if testing is necessary. In some cases, public health nurses may refer a student or staff directly to a testing center for testing.

Gallatin City-County Health Department will follow guidance from the CDC in determining who needs to be placed in isolation or quarantine. Isolation is the term that refers to separating someone who is sick

with COVID-19. Quarantine is the term for someone who was exposed to someone who has the disease, and is at higher risk to develop and spread the disease themselves. Anyone with a laboratory confirmed case of the disease will be required to isolate until they are no longer contagious, typically 10 days from the onset of symptoms.

What is contact tracing and what will that look like in a school/district?

Contact tracing is the means by which COVID-19 infections and exposures are identified, subsequently notified, and ultimately isolated or quarantined to reduce spread of the virus. Contact tracing is a fundamental public health practice that is used to stop the spread of many infectious diseases, including COVID-19. Contact tracing consists of a series of interviews, performed by public health nurses and workers, which are designed to identify close contacts of a student or staff member that tested positive for COVID-19. Close contacts are defined as having been within six feet of an infected individual for more than 15 minutes.

What will happen if my child is in contact with someone who has COVID-19?

The CDC currently recommends that close contacts of known cases (those who have been within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) be quarantined at home to ensure they do not develop and spread the disease. This quarantine period lasts for 14 days from the person's last known exposure to the person who has the disease.

Identifying close contacts will also take into account the ages of students because different ages interact in different ways. In some cases, it may be necessary to quarantine entire classrooms in order to contain spread of the disease.

In some cases, students identified as close contacts may be asked to have a COVID-19 test, especially if they have symptoms. If the test comes back positive for COVID-19, the Health Department will contact the parent/guardian and work with them to help connect to health care services or social supports.

If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, when can they return to school?

That will depend on a number of factors, including how they are doing recuperating from the disease. In general, and with some exceptions, students and staff who are diagnosed with COVID-19 through a lab test and who do not have a fever or worsening symptoms should be able to go back to school 10 days after the onset of symptoms. Ten days from the onset of symptoms is the period of time when someone who has the disease is most likely to spread it to others.

A public health nurse from Gallatin City-County Health Department will work with parents directly and will determine when a child is no longer contagious and can go back to school.

If a student or staff member is identified as a close contact and placed in quarantine, when can they go back to school?

Children with a known close contact with COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days from their last contact with that case and until return to school is approved by the local health department in accordance with the CDC guidance. This period of time is recommended by the CDC because it is the period during which someone who has been exposed may develop the disease and pass it on to others.

A public health nurse from Gallatin City-County Health Department will work with families directly and will determine when a child can go back to school.

If a student or staff member is identified as a close contact and then have a negative COVID-19 test, can they go back to school immediately?

No. In order to protect others in the school, CDC recommends that all students or staff who have been identified as close contacts stay at home for 14 days from their last exposure. That's because even if someone tests negative immediately after an exposure, the virus typically take varying lengths of time to make someone sick. It is possible that someone who tests negative for active disease is still carrying the virus and could develop the disease at a later date. The test cannot predict if you will develop the disease at a later date.

If a student in quarantine feels fine, why can't they go back to school?

One of the hardest things about COVID-19 is that people who are exposed to the disease may not develop the disease for up to 14 days. During that time, called an "incubation period", they may be carrying the virus and could develop the disease at any time and pass it on to others.

It is also possible that people, especially children, may develop the disease and pass it on to others before they develop symptoms. This is what makes the virus hard to control and why we ask people who have been exposed and are most likely to develop the disease to stay at home until they are no longer at risk to spread the disease.

Will I be notified if my child is not a close contact?

A health department public health nurse or other staff will be in contact with parents of all students identified as a close contact and work with those families to answer questions and provide resources. In addition, the schools and the health department will communicate to parents and staff when cases inside a school are identified and keep the updated on efforts to limit disease spread.

However, it will not be possible for schools or public health staff to contact parents of every student who is not a close contact. Parents who are concerned their child may have been exposed can call the school or the health department.

If a student or staff is wearing a face covering do they still need to stay in quarantine?

Yes. While the CDC recommends face coverings as an important way to reduce disease transmission, current guidance advises infection control measures (including isolation and quarantine) for anyone who is a close contact with a known case, whether they are wearing a face covering or not.

Face coverings are a tool to help reduce spread of the disease through droplets exhaled by people when they talk, sneeze, or cough. But face coverings do not offer 100% protection and do not remove all risk. That's why it is so important for all students and staff to stay home if they are sick, keep six feet from others when feasible, and wash their hands frequently and thoroughly.

What is the value of face coverings?

Face coverings are an important strategy to reduce transmission of the COVID-19, primarily by reducing the spread of infection from the wearer to those around. The Gallatin City-County Board of Health has

approved an emergency health rule applicable to all schools in Gallatin County requiring the use of face coverings for all adults and children in grades 6-12 whenever social distancing cannot be achieved. Older children, such as those in middle and high school, are likely to be able to follow guidance regarding proper mask usage. Thus, the use of face coverings can provide an additional layer of protection against the spread of infection. It is also recommended that children wear face coverings while riding a bus or shared transportation.

I have heard that most children get mild symptoms and recover well if they contract COVID-19? Is this true, and if so why are we making such a big deal about this?

Thankfully, it is true that many children who contract the disease have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. It is also true that it is exceedingly rare for a child to become hospitalized or die from COVID-19. However, there have been rare serious cases in children and some children do seem to develop long-term health effects from the virus.

But the main reason we are taking such careful precautions about this disease is to limit spread within our community to protect those who are more likely to get seriously ill. We know that the disease is more dangerous for people over the age of 60 and people with underlying health conditions (such as diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, obesity, heart and lung conditions, or compromised immune systems). And because the virus that causes COVID-19 is new to human beings, we know that few people have built up immunity to the disease. These factors make it especially important to do all we can to contain spread of the disease through measures such as those summarized in this document.