

# SCHOOLS: CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ISOLATION AND RETURN REQUIREMENTS

Last Updated: Dec. 7, 2022

**ISOLATION:** Physically separating an individual with symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 away from others to prevent spread. COVID-19 typically spreads between individuals who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets created when someone talks, coughs, or sneezes.

If you/your student has tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms of COVID-19, immediately report it to your school and begin isolation. The length of isolation will depend on severity of symptoms and whether the positive individual can correctly and consistently wear a well-fitting mask.

This resource applies to any individual regardless of vaccination status or history of COVID-19 diagnosis. District of Columbia regulations for schools require students and staff to be temporarily removed from school if they have symptoms or have tested positive for a communicable disease.

## WHAT TO DO WHILE IN ISOLATION:

- Stay at home (if it is safe to do so), except to get medical care.
- Do not travel.
- Separate yourself from other people and pets in your home as much as possible, and if possible, in a separate room and bathroom (or clean between uses).
  - Especially separate from anyone who is immunocompromised, at higher risk for severe COVID-19, or unvaccinated or not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccination.
- Wear a well-fitting mask if you need to be near any other members of your household (caregivers should also wear a mask if they need to be near the isolated person. Note: masks should not be worn while sleeping).
- Bring as much fresh air into your home as possible, weather and safety permitting, especially in any shared spaces.
- Eat in separate areas, and wash dishes used by the sick person in hot water while wearing gloves or in dishwasher.
- Do not share personal items (dishes, towels, cell phones, etc.) with others.
- Do not allow visitors in your home.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Monitor symptoms and seek emergency medical attention if the ill individual has any of the following symptoms:
  - trouble breathing
  - not enough breath to get out a full sentence
  - coughing so much they can't catch their breath
  - persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - new confusion
  - inability to wake/stay awake
  - pale/gray/blue-colored lips or nail beds (depending on skin tone)
- *This list does not include all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you. Call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility if necessary and notify the operator that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.*



**CALCULATING ISOLATION:** Day 0 is the first day of symptoms or a positive viral test. Day 1 is the first full day after symptoms developed or the specimen was collected.

**WHEN SHOULD THE STUDENT RETURN TO SCHOOL IF I AM UNSURE WHETHER THE SYMPTOMS ARE DUE TO COVID-19?**

RETURNING AFTER SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19	
IF TESTED FOR COVID-19	IF NOT TESTED FOR COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If test is positive: See table below.</li> <li>If test is negative: When the school's standard criteria to return after illness is met.</li> <li>Note: You may use either an antigen test or a NAAT (e.g., PCR) test.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit documentation from a healthcare provider of an alternate diagnosis and meet standard criteria to return after illness.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet COVID-19 symptom-based criteria to return:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 24 hours after the fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medication (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen) and symptoms have improved;</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>AND after ending isolation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unable to wear a well-fitting mask: After at least 10 days from when symptoms first started (i.e., on day 11)</li> <li>Able to wear a well-fitting mask: After at least 5 days from when symptoms first started (i.e., on day 6) and able to wear a well-fitting mask while in school through day 10.</li> </ul>

**WHEN SHOULD THE STUDENT RETURN TO SCHOOL AFTER TESTING POSITIVE?**

RETURNING FROM ISOLATION AFTER TESTING POSITIVE FOR COVID-19	
SYMPTOM SEVERITY	
<p><b>COVID-19 with Mild Illness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mild illness means no shortness of breath or the need for prescription medications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>If fever-free for at least 24 hours</b> without the use of fever-lowering medications (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen) <b>AND other symptoms have improved:</b><sup>1</sup> Return after at least 5 days (i.e., on day 6) from when symptoms first started.</li> <li><b>If still have a fever</b> and/or other symptoms have not improved at day 5: Return after being fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and other symptoms have improved.</li> </ul> <p>AND after ending isolation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Wear a well-fitting mask</b> while in school through day 10.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>If an individual has access to antigen tests, consider using them.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Positive Test:</u> Return and continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours to take another antigen test (may still be infectious). Continue taking antigen tests at least 48 hours apart until there are 2 sequential negative results. (May need to continue wearing a mask and testing beyond day 10).</li> <li><u>2 Sequential Negative Tests Taken 48 Hours Apart:</u> Return and remove mask sooner than day 10.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Moderate or Severe Illness OR Individual has Weakened Immune System</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate illness means experiencing shortness of breath or having difficulty breathing.</li> <li>Severe illness means the individual was hospitalized.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return after at least 10 days (i.e., on day 11) from when symptoms first started.</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: Individuals who had severe illness or a weakened immune system should consult with their doctor before ending isolation. Ending isolation without a viral test may not be an option for these individuals.</i></p>
<p><b>No Symptoms (Asymptomatic Infection)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>If symptoms develop:</b> Isolation restarts with day 0 as the day symptoms started.</li> <li><b>If continue to have no symptoms:</b> Return after at least 5 days (i.e., on day 6) from positive test.</li> </ul> <p>AND after ending isolation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Wear a well-fitting mask in school through day 10.</b></li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>If symptoms have not developed and an individual has access to antigen tests, consider using them.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Positive Test:</u> Return and continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours to take another antigen test (may still be infectious). Continue taking antigen tests at least 48 hours apart until 2 sequential negative results. (May need to continue wearing a mask and testing beyond day 10.)</li> <li><u>2 Sequential Negative Tests Taken 48 Hours Apart:</u> Return and remove mask sooner than day 10.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation