



Guidance for Parents of School-aged Children

West Piedmont Health District

Henry County, City of Martinsville, Patrick County, Franklin County

Much has changed in the COVID-19 pandemic over the past months. While we are getting students back in the classroom and learning in person, the West Piedmont Health District is currently experiencing high community transmission. To address the presence of the highly contagious Delta variant of COVID-19, school use of layered prevention strategies can serve to limit exposure and transmission of the virus. Information, as well as the virus itself, continues to change and evolve as we learn more. The Health Department continues to work closely with our partners in the schools to prevent the spread of the illness and disinformation about COVID-19.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM PARENTS ABOUT SCHOOLS AND COVID-19

COVID-19 Exposures at Schools

I received a communication from school saying there is a positive COVID-19 case. How long will it take for the Health Department to contact me to tell me if my student is a close contact?

The Health Department and the schools share the same objectives:

- Timely investigations
- Decreased transmission in the schools
- Maximized in-person learning

When there is a student or staff COVID-19 case, school personnel notifies individuals who may have had close contact with the case and provides that information to the WPHD investigative team. WPHD works as quickly as possible to determine which of the contacts need to be isolated, quarantined, or cleared to return to school.

With the opening of schools, there was an increased number of reported cases of COVID-19 that represented illnesses students acquired from community sources before school opened. This has stressed the system, resulting in some investigations taking several days.

The Health Department has a dedicated team of investigators who work specifically on school related investigations and provide guidance and recommendations. Our goal is to keep children learning in-person safely, allowing students to return to the classroom more quickly.

How will the Health Department contact me?

The staff member will contact you by phone or electronically.

How do I know the Health Department has my correct phone number?

The staff member will use the phone number on your student's updated emergency care card. It is essential for you to keep this updated.

Will Health Department contact all parents/guardians of the individual student? Or just one?

The staff member will contact the one listed on the emergency care card.



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Will the Health Department leave a message on my voicemail?

The staff member will leave a message for you. The message will include the name of your contact interviewer and the number to call back. Additionally, they may send an email to your email of record with the school. So it is important to make sure your contact information is up to date with the schools and accurate.

Is the Health Department conducting contact investigations during the weekend?

Yes, investigations occur seven days a week.

Are school administrators and staff involved in conducting contact investigations?

As part of the investigation process, the Health Department works with both the COVID-19 case and school administrators to identify those that may have been exposed to COVID-19. This is done by identifying those who had close contact with the COVID-19 case either in or out of school.

What is a 'close contact'?

A close contact is defined as someone who has spent more than 15 minutes during a 24-hour period within 6 feet of someone who has tested positive. The CDC indicates a K-12 exception to this definition. In the K-12 indoor and outdoor classroom setting, a student who was within 3 to 6 feet on an infected student is not considered a close contact when:

- Both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks, AND
- Other K-12 prevention strategies were in place in the K-12 school setting.

This exception may also be applied to school buses when the following criteria are met:

- Documented seating charts and
- Assurance that masks are worn and students remain in assigned seats, either via video monitoring if available, or attestation from the bus driver or monitor.

What happens to students who have been identified as a close contact with someone with COVID-19?

Due to the local current surge, the Health Department has not been conducting contact tracing with every student. We work with the cases and schools to identify close contacts and we provide the guidance to the school for the earliest return date post-exposure. Schools handle verifying vaccine information.

Are siblings automatically considered close contacts?

Siblings may or may not be close contacts, it depends on their exposure to an individual with COVID-19.

- The sibling is considered a close contact if they spent more than 15 minutes during a 24-hour period within 6 feet of their sibling who has tested positive. In this case, the sibling would need to quarantine unless they were fully-vaccinated and asymptomatic. Unvaccinated siblings would need to quarantine for 14 days.
- If the sibling is a household contact to someone who is quarantining (meaning, the person is well, without symptoms, but was exposed), they are considered a "contact-to-a-contact" and no public health restriction is placed on them.



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Quarantine and Isolation

My child is vaccinated but was exposed to a case at school. Why do they need to stay home in quarantine?

Your child's school will verify their vaccination status and advise you of school policy regarding this matter. If you have misplaced your child's COVID-19 vaccination card or need documentation of their vaccination status, visit the Virginia Department of Health [COVID-19 Vaccination Record Request Portal](#).

My unvaccinated child who was exposed in school tested negative for COVID-19. Can they end quarantine?

No. Someone who was a close contact of someone with COVID-19 and is not fully vaccinated should stay home and monitor symptoms for 14 days after the last time they interacted with the person. The Health Department team will help families understand the steps to a successful quarantine.

My student was sick with COVID-19 illness and asked to isolate. When can they discontinue isolation after having COVID-19 illness?

Isolation separates those diagnosed with COVID-19 from people who are not sick. People who are in isolation should stay at home in a separate room in the house to prevent infecting others.

Isolation can end when:

1. At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, AND
2. At least 24 hours have passed with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, AND
3. Other symptoms have improved.

For individuals who tested positive but never had symptoms, isolation can end 10 days after the positive test.

A negative test does not automatically end isolation. If your child has a previous positive COVID test and receives a second test which is negative, they still must continue to isolate and monitor symptoms for the full 10 days - regardless of vaccination status. The Health Department will notify the student/their parent when they are released from isolation.

Can the student discontinue isolation as soon as they test negative?

No. A negative test does not automatically end isolation. If your child has a previous positive COVID test and receives a second test which is negative, they still must continue to isolate and monitor to symptoms for the full 10 days - regardless of vaccination status.

How do I know it's the Health Department calling and not a scam?

Calls from the West Piedmont Health District's case and contact investigation team generally come from an (804) area code. An electronic communication will come from an official email @vdh.virginia.gov.

- You will never be asked for money, your social security number, financial or bank account information, passwords, or other personal information unrelated to COVID-19.
- We will not ask for photographs or videos of any kind.



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- Unless you give permission, your name will not be revealed to those you came in contact with — even if asked.

If you receive a call or voicemail and want to be sure that it is legitimate, you can call the Henry-Martinsville Health Department at 276-638-2311 or for calls in Patrick County, 804-508-0797 for verification.

I received a notice that a student or staff member in my child's classroom has been diagnosed with COVID-19. I have multiple children at the same school. How do I find out which child this impacts?

Please contact your school directly to find out which child's class is impacted.

COVID-19 Testing

How do I obtain a COVID-19 test?

Contact your health care provider or local pharmacy or visit <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/COVID-19-testing-sites/>. The Health Departments in the West Piedmont Health District do not offer COVID testing. It is recommended that you utilize a health care provider for testing instead of a home test. This is because the health care provider will create a record of the test result, and that record might be needed by your family or student to be released from isolation.

Other School Topics

I have concerns about social distancing, masking, or other health and safety topics at my child's school. Who do I reach out to?

Anyone who has a concern about prevention and safety topics at schools – social distancing, masks or other issues – is asked to email their school as they have worked hard to ensure layered prevention strategies in the school environment, including guidance from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), CDC, VDH and West Piedmont Health District to be able to provide in-person learning while using the key strategies.

How can I find information on cases at my school?

Information can be found on the individual school COVID Dashboards: The links are:

- Franklin County Public Schools: <https://www.frco.k12.va.us/f c p s c o v i d dashboard>

- Patrick County Public Schools: https://www.patrick.k12.va.us/families/COVID-19_dashboard

- Henry County Public Schools: <https://www.henry.k12.va.us/domain/2635>

- Martinsville City Schools: <https://www.martinsville.k12.va.us/division-updates/COVID-19/COVID-19-data-dashboard>

Information for private and other schools can be obtained by contacting the school directly.



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Other Topics

My child had a non-school COVID-19 exposure (an exposure from a community activity and not from school), or tested positive for COVID-19, and needs to stay home. Does the school need to know why? Will the Health Department share their information with the school?

While remaining compliant with [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#) by protecting your child's health information, the Health Department works with local schools to ensure quarantined/isolated students are excluded from in-person learning. Once your child's quarantine/isolation period is over, the Health Department will provide the student with a clearance letter so he/she may return to in-school learning.

How can I keep my child safe from COVID-19?

You can protect the health of your family by keeping up the healthy behaviors. Taking a layered approach to prevention helps protect you and others, the more layers you use the easier it will be to slow the spread.

- Get your child vaccinated if they are 12 or older. Adults in the household should also be vaccinated. This will help prevent the spread of COVID in families to those who are not yet able to receive the vaccine. Despite some breakthrough cases, vaccination remains the most important approach to prevent COVID-19 and particularly to prevent more severe infection. You can find vaccinations by visiting [vaccinefinder.org](https://www.vaccinefinder.org), calling 1877-829-4682, contacting our Care Resource Coordinator at 276-638-2311, ext 173. Each Health Department holds vaccine clinics weekly; you can schedule appointments using any of the methods above. Vaccinations are free.
- Keep your child home when they are ill and seek care from a health care provider.
- Teach them to maintain 6 feet physical distancing from others whenever possible.
- Encourage correct mask use in school and public indoor settings.
- When possible avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.
- Practice good handwashing.
- Get your child tested if they symptomatic or if they have spent time with some who is sick or tested positive for COVID-19.
- Adhere to Health Department recommendations for isolation and quarantine if they are infected or are a close contact of an infected person.

You should also consider:

- Your family's needs if you live with people who are not vaccinated or who have a condition or who have a weakened immune system.
- What activities that you would like to participate in. According to the CDC:

You are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 when you

- Attend crowded, poorly ventilated indoor events
- Have close contact with infected people at home



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You are less likely to be exposed to COVID-19 when you

- Attend outdoor activities
- Stay at least 6 feet apart
- Limit the amount of time spent with people who don't live with you

RESOURCES

[Virginia Department of Education 2021-22 School Year FAQ](#)

[Infographic: Contact Tracing in Schools \(VDH\)](#)

GLOSSARY

QUARANTINE

Quarantine separates people who have been exposed to COVID-19 but are not yet sick. People who are in quarantine need to stay home for 14 days from the date of their last exposure to a sick individual and monitor for symptoms. The Health Department will notify them when they are released. It is important that schools, the staff, and the student body accept that person back into the school community without fear or stigma.

ISOLATION

Isolation separates those diagnosed with COVID-19 from people who are not sick. People who are in isolation should stay at home in a separate room in the house to prevent infecting others. Isolation can end when an individual has not had a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications AND has had improving symptoms AND it is 10 days from their onset of symptoms. For individuals who tested positive but never had symptoms, isolation can end 10 days after the positive test. At this point the Health Department will notify them they are released. This discharge from isolation is based on CDC and VDH guidance. It is important that schools, staff, and student body accept that person back into the school community without fear or stigma.

CLOSE CONTACT (NON-SCHOOL SETTING, AND NON-STUDENTS IN A SCHOOL SETTING)

A close contact is defined as someone who has spent more than 15 minutes during a 24-hour period within 6 feet of someone who has tested positive. Close contacts must stay home and quarantine for 14 days from the date of their last exposure to a sick individual and monitor for symptoms. The Health Department will notify them when they are released from quarantine.

CLOSE CONTACT (STUDENTS IN A SCHOOL SETTING)

In a school setting, the close contact definition (above) excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student when:

- Both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks, AND
- Other K-12 prevention strategies were in place in the K-12 school setting.



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CONTACT-TO-A-CONTACT

A person who is a close contact to someone who is quarantining, such as a household contact to a quarantined individual - for example, a sibling to a quarantining student. No public health restrictions are placed on these contacts.

FULLY VACCINATED

Most people are considered fully vaccinated 2 weeks after your second dose of the Pfizer-BioNtech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, or 2 weeks after the single-dose J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine.

OUTBREAK

The Virginia Department of Health use the [national definition of an outbreak in an educational setting](#): Defined as two or more laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff with onsets within a 14-day period, who are epidemiologically linked, do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing.