

Cases and Outbreaks in Schools

Executive Summary

Overview

Schools are required to report all outbreaks to their local public health agency or CDPHE. Schools must respond when students, teachers or staff test positive or are suspected to have COVID-19 or if there is an outbreak. The response will vary based on the number of illnesses. In all outbreaks, there are steps schools must take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Confirmed outbreaks will be posted on CDPHE's website.

What is an outbreak?

In a **confirmed outbreak**, one or more of the following have occurred:

- **Classroom/cohort outbreak:** Two or more students/teachers/staff from separate households tested positive for COVID-19, with onset within 14 days in a single classroom or cohort.
- **School-wide outbreak** means one or more of the following are true:
 - In schools practicing cohorting, two or more classrooms or cohorts that meet the classroom/cohort outbreak definition (above) that occurs within 14 days.
 - In schools not practicing cohorting, two or more people who tested positive for COVID-19 from separate households with onset within 14 days in the same school.
 - 5% or more unrelated students/teachers/staff have confirmed COVID-19 within a 14 day period (minimum of 10 unrelated students/staff).
- **Staff outbreak:** Two or more teachers/staff with confirmed COVID-19 who are close contacts within the school setting, with onset within 14 days.

In a **suspected outbreak**, there is one person who tested positive for COVID-19 and one or more who probably has COVID-19 from different households in one classroom or cohort, a single person who tested positive for COVID-19 in two or more classrooms, or 10% or higher absenteeism schoolwide for any reason.

Before an outbreak

- Schoolwide testing is not recommended, but preventive measures such as mask wearing, social distancing and cohorting (the practice of keeping the same individuals in the same group at all times during the school day) are.

- Consider preventive measures for other respiratory infections, such as promoting the seasonal flu vaccine/hosting a clinic, handwashing and cleaning surfaces, and educating students, teachers, and staff on staying home when sick.

Surveillance and reporting requirements

- CDPHE will begin collecting data on absenteeism using the Absenteeism School Surveillance Program beginning in August 2020. This information will only be shared publicly in aggregate.
- **Schools are required to report all confirmed and suspected outbreaks within four hours in accordance with state law.** Schools may complete the [CDPHE Outbreak reporting form](#) and email it to cdphe_covid_outbreak@state.co.us, contact their [local public health agency](#), or call CDPHE at 303-692-2700.

Responding to confirmed and suspected cases

Whenever students, teachers, or staff test positive for COVID-19 or are suspected to have it, they should isolate until released (usually 10 days after symptom onset, 24+ hours fever-free, and improving symptoms). Those who have COVID-19 symptoms should get tested. Close contacts of those who had or were suspected to have the virus should isolate for 14 days and wait until either they develop symptoms or seven days have passed before they get tested. Individuals who need tests can get a test through their healthcare provider or public health if they do not have a healthcare provider.

Closures

A classroom or cohort should be closed if there is a single confirmed or probable infection in the cohort because all members of the class or cohort should quarantine for 14 days.

A school should be closed when:

- Five or more class/cohort outbreaks happen in a 14-day period.
- 5% or more unrelated students/teachers/staff have confirmed COVID-19 within a 14-day period (minimum of 10 unrelated students/staff).
- Additional time is needed to clean the school before students/teachers/staff return or gather student/teachers/staff illness data and confer with public health.
- A school cannot operate because a large number of students/teachers/staff are absent. “Large number” is determined by the school/district.

A district should close in accordance with Colorado Department of Education (CDE) [reopening guidance](#).

Learn more in the [full guidance](#).