



TARRANT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
A nationally accredited public health department

Greetings!

By now I am sure you are all aware that the CDC has released [new isolation and quarantine guidelines](#) for the general population. Yesterday, they [added to that guidance](#) stating that the new guidance *does* apply to K-12 schools.

There are some caveats to this guidance that we need to consider. The CDC also gives very specific [mitigation strategies](#) that they are assuming schools are following when they give their isolation and quarantine guidance. Among those:

- [Consistent and correct mask use](#)
- [Physical distancing and cohorting](#)
- [Screening testing to identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks](#)
- [Ventilation](#)
- [Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine](#)

If you are not utilizing these parts of the CDC guidance in order to mitigate the risk of transmission in schools, shortening your isolation period for COVID positive staff and students will *not* keep students and staff in your schools safe. We know that people shed virus for up to 10 days. If you are unable to require those who have tested positive for COVID to *wear a mask for the remainder of the 10-day isolation period*, it is simply too dangerous to allow them to return to your campuses before the 10-day isolation period has been completed.

[The CDC states:](#)

*“Preliminary data suggest that the Omicron variant is up to **three times more infectious** than the Delta variant ^[14]. With the recommended shorter isolation and quarantine periods, it is **critical that people continue to wear well-fitting masks and take additional precautions for 5 days after leaving isolation or quarantine** ^[15]. In addition, isolation should only end if a person has been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and other symptoms have resolved. Modeling data from the United Kingdom reinforce the importance of mask use; after the 5th day after a positive test, an estimated 31% of persons remain infectious ^[16]. Mask use and layered prevention strategies, such as receiving all recommended vaccination and booster doses, physical distancing, [screening testing](#), and improved [ventilation](#), are key to preventing COVID-19 and decreasing transmission.”*

If you are unable to adhere to ALL the CDC guidance on your campus, TCPH recommends you avoid shortening your isolation periods for COVID positive individuals.

Additionally, in Texas, we have the added school guidance from the TEA. [TEA guidelines](#) state:

“...school systems **must exclude students** from attending school in person who are actively sick with COVID-19...see the [DSHS rule](#) for more details, including the conditions for ending the exclusion period and returning to school.” “...school systems **must exclude staff** from attending school in person...staff may return when the re-entry conditions have been met, as described in the [DSHS rule](#) used for students.”

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The DSHS criteria referred to is below:

“Coronavirus disease 2019 commonly referred to as COVID-19 is a disease requiring exclusion from school under 25 Tex. Admin. Code § 97.7.

A school administrator shall exclude from attendance any child having or suspected of having COVID-19. Exclusion shall continue until the readmission criteria for the conditions are met. The readmission criteria for COVID-19 is as follows:

If symptomatic, exclude until at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset, and fever free*, and other symptoms have improved. Children who test positive for COVID-19 but do not have any symptoms must stay home until at least 10 days after the day they were tested.

*Fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever suppressing medications. Fever is a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit (37.8° Celsius) or higher.

For a complete list of all disease requiring exclusion from school and the readmission criteria, please visit [DSHS School Health Recommendations for the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases in a Group-Care Setting.](#)”

The exclusions list can be found here:

https://dshs.texas.gov/IDCU/health/schools_childcare/Communicable-Disease-Chart-Schools-and-Childcare-Centers-073021.pdf

As you can see, TEA guidelines require schools to follow the DSHS rule referenced above for both students and staff. The DSHS guidance states that COVID positive individuals must isolate for 10 days.

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