

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Independent Heads of School
FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Response Testing Programs for Schools, Fall-Winter 2021
DATE: October 1, 2021

Purpose

This memo outlines additional COVID-19 testing programs to support in-person learning during the 2021-22 school year. The goals of these programs are to:

1. Ensure students and staff can participate in in-person learning whenever possible, as schools respond to confirmed cases of COVID-19.
2. Simplify contact tracing protocols and reduce the burden on schools.
3. Significantly reduce, and whenever possible eliminate, the disruptions caused by positive cases of COVID-19 on students, their families, and schools.

Options for COVID-19 Response Testing in Vermont Schools

Vermont Supervisory Unions (SU/SDs) and Independent Schools will have access to several different COVID-19 testing "tools." Each is intended to respond to different needs and is outlined in more detail below.

Test Type 1: "Test to Stay" Rapid Antigen Testing

Test to Stay Programs (TTS) use rapid-results antigen tests and have already been adopted in several other U.S. states. In these programs, any asymptomatic students, or staff identified as close contacts of a confirmed positive student or staff member, can take a rapid-result antigen test before starting school for each day of the quarantine period. With a negative rapid test result the student or staff member can attend school.

The Test to Stay Program is intended for use when a student or staff member has been exposed in school to a COVID-19 case. The State will provide the test kits, which typically return results within 15-20 minutes.

It is important to note that vaccinated close contacts do not need to quarantine, and therefore should not participate in TTS.

How Does the Test to Stay Program Work?

When a student or staff member with COVID-19 is present in school during their infectious period, the school should implement Test to Stay for unvaccinated close contacts. When a case is identified during the school day, the following should occur:

1. The school should conduct contact tracing to identify close contacts.

2. Unvaccinated close contacts (students and staff) finish the school day as normal.
3. The following day, unvaccinated close contacts that do not participate in Test to Stay must quarantine (stay home from school). Unvaccinated close contacts who participate in Test to Stay come to school as normal, and must be tested *before* beginning the school day.
 - a. Schools should conduct Test to Stay tests in a way that prevents participants from mixing with other students and staff until they have their results.
 - b. Students may ride the bus to school, but must remain masked, per federal regulations. If a student receives a positive antigen test, it will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian to pick the student up from school and they will not be permitted to ride the bus home, as they are considered a positive COVID-19 case.
4. Close contacts participating in Test to Stay will receive an antigen test each morning until a total of 7 days have elapsed from the date of last exposure to the case.
5. While students and staff are participating in Test to Stay antigen testing they should quarantine at home while outside of school, including over the weekend.

Siblings of positive cases should not participate in test to stay and should follow Health Department guidance for quarantine.

Procedures for Symptomatic Students/Staff at School

The above outlined procedure applies to the following scenarios for students and staff with COVID -19 symptoms.

Scenario 1 – Individual is symptomatic, antigen test negative

When a student or staff member is symptomatic, they will get an antigen test. If the antigen test comes back *negative*:

- The individual should still be sent home and receive a confirmatory in-school response PCR test (see [test type 2](#)) before they leave school. If an in-school test is unavailable, the school may provide a [Take Home PCR Test](#), (see test type 3) to be self-administered at home and either mailed that same day to the lab via UPS or other courier service or returned to the school for shipping.
- Close contacts do not need to be identified yet, and other students and staff members will continue their day as normal.
- If the symptomatic individual's PCR test comes back positive, the school commences a Test to Stay Program for unvaccinated close contacts who choose to participate until seven days has lapsed since the date of the last exposure.
- If the PCR test comes back negative, no antigen testing is necessary, and no additional steps are required.

Scenario 2 – Individual is symptomatic, antigen test positive

When a student or staff member is symptomatic, they will get an antigen test. If the antigen test comes back *positive*:

- The individual should be sent home and complete their [isolation](#) period.
- Test to Stay should start for unvaccinated close contacts the next day.

- Antigen testing should continue for 7 days since the date of last exposure.

Scenario 3 – Procedures upon learning of a positive PCR result

When a student or staff member receives a positive PCR test result, regardless of whether they are symptomatic or not:

- The individual should be sent home (or not come to school) and complete their [isolation](#) period.
- Test to Stay should start for unvaccinated close contacts as early as possible, but no later than the next day.
- Antigen testing should continue for 7 days since the date of last exposure.

Procedures for Students or Staff Opting Out of Test to Stay

If a student (and/or their family) or staff member wishes to opt-out of TTS, the following options are available:

- The student/staff member may quarantine, and take a PCR test (on day 7 or later after their exposure). The individual returns to school after a negative PCR test result. Schools may either conduct an in-school PCR response clinic (see [Test Type 2](#)), or provide a Take Home PCR Test (see [Test Type 3](#)), self-administered at home and either mailed that same day to the lab via UPS or other courier service, or returned to the school for shipping.
- The student/staff member may quarantine for 14 days.

Test Type 2: In-School PCR Response Testing

Schools may administer in-school PCR response tests. These tests are intended for any of the following scenarios:

- Testing symptomatic students/staff after a negative antigen test or in the absence of an antigen test.
- Testing a large number of students or staff members out of quarantine.
- Testing vaccinated close contacts of COVID-19 cases between days 3 and 5 after exposure.

Schools may administer the tests to individual students and staff and to groups of students as necessary and if applicable. Tests used for In-School PCR Response Testing are CIC Health “White Label” PCR test kits. Schools prepare, register, and administer the tests using the Binx registration system, with testing supervised by SU/SD nursing staff or district or state-provided testing resources.

Test Type 3: Take Home PCR Tests

Schools should keep on hand, and may give out, Take Home PCR test kits. These test kits are intended for a broad range of uses, including members of the public, symptomatic students who need to stay home, and their families. Recommended use cases include:

- Symptomatic students and staff.
- Close contacts of COVID-19 cases.

- Any member of the school community or their family who needs a test.

While the tests are intended for “at home” (unobserved) use, they can be self-administered by an individual or their family at any location (including the school parking lot). Test kits include a self-registered test kit, vial, shipping box, and pre-paid courier (UPS) shipping.

To test, individuals must:

- Register the test kits using the instructions on the kit.
- Follow instructions on the testing portal to collect their sample.
- Seal their sample and return it the same day to applicable courier service provider (UPS) or return to their school.
- Receive test results via the testing portal.

Schools may alternately accept kits from families on the same day they collected the sample and return the kits to applicable courier service or UPS as a convenience and benefit to their learning community.

For operational questions, SU/SD administrators should contact the AOE COVID-19 Response Team by emailing aoe.covid19testing@vermont.gov