

School-Based Modified Quarantine Guidance: Masked Return to School* After COVID-19 Exposure

Updated: February 2, 2022

*See additional section below for children in Early Care and Education/Child Care programs (ECE), including childcare centers, home-based programs, Head Start, and other pre-kindergarten programs.

Background:

In schools where universal masking and other CDC-recommended mitigation measures are implemented, **the risk of secondary transmission of SARS-CoV2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) in classroom settings is low, even when community transmission is relatively high.** Due to the importance of in-school learning and the low risk of in-school COVID-19 transmission when multiple mitigation strategies are in place, many states and local jurisdictions (including [Lake County, IL](#) and [Los Angeles, CA](#)) have implemented school-based quarantine strategies. This allows students exposed to COVID-19 ([close contacts](#)) to quarantine while attending school (“school-based quarantine”), as long as certain parameters are met. CDC is also supportive of this [approach](#).

Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH) continues to recommend that schools follow CDC and MCDPH guidelines for [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#). In an effort to minimize disruptions of in-person learning in Maricopa County schools, CDC and MCDPH support the implementation of a **school-based modified quarantine strategy** tailored to individual schools based on risk of transmission. **Each school or district should implement the strategy that best suits the needs of their students and families.**

Benefit of Participation:

This is a risk-based modified quarantine strategy that allows students who are exposed to COVID-19 in or outside of school ([close contacts](#)), and who are not [up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations](#) or have not had COVID-19 in the last 90 days, to quarantine in the classroom instead of at home, as long as certain eligibility criteria are met.

Eligibility Criteria:

In order to participate in **ANY** modified quarantine strategy, **the following criteria must be met:**

- Student is identified as a [close contact](#) of someone with COVID-19 who should [quarantine](#) based on [MCDPH guidance](#); and
- Does **not** have COVID-19 [symptoms](#); and
- Must **consistently and correctly wear a [well-fitting face mask](#) at all times while in school** (except while eating/drinking).

Important Concepts:

- MCDPH continues to recommend that schools follow CDC Guidance for [COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#), including [quarantine](#).
- All options for MCDPH’s school-based modified quarantine guidance require timely individual case investigation and contact tracing.
- A person who is [up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations](#) OR who has had COVID-19 in the last 90 days does not need to [quarantine](#) but should wear a [well-fitting face mask](#) around others and monitor for symptoms until it has been 10 full days since their last exposure. If symptoms develop, they should [isolate](#) at home and test.
- All [close contacts](#) who participate in school-based quarantine during their 10-day quarantine period **MUST wear a [well-fitting face mask](#) while around others.**
 - Quarantine at school without face masks is **NOT RECOMMENDED** by MCDPH or CDC.
- Anyone with [symptoms of COVID-19](#), including students participating in school-based quarantine, is **REQUIRED** to [isolate](#) at home per [MCDPH guidance](#).
 - Those who **test positive** must [isolate](#) for at least 5 days, followed by 5 days wearing a mask per CDC and MCDPH guidance.

- Those who **test negative** may return to school after they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication.
- **Untested** symptomatic students are **not eligible** to participate in school-based modified quarantine **until** they have tested negative and have been fever-free for a minimum of 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.

Testing During School-Based Modified Quarantine:

- Testing of **close contacts who are quarantining in school** with a COVID-19 PCR or antigen test is recommended (1) as soon as the exposure is identified and (2) again after 5 full days following the exposure, if tests are available.
 - Day 0 is the day that the student was exposed to the COVID-19 case.
- More frequent testing likely decreases risk; however, test availability may limit testing frequency.

How to Evaluate Risk Level in School-Based Modified Quarantine:

Consistent and correct use of [well-fitting face masks](#) reduces the spread of COVID-19. The more widespread masks are consistently used in schools, the lower the risk of transmission during a 10-day school-based quarantine strategy. Please see the chart below for additional information.

- The **lowest risk** scenario is when there is a school-wide requirement for face masks, and both the case and [close contacts](#) are masked during the exposure period.
- The **risk of in-school transmission increases** when either there is no school-wide requirement for face masks or when either the case or [close contacts](#) are not masked during the exposure period.
- The **highest risk** for in-school transmission is when there is no school-wide requirement for face masks and when either the case or the [close contacts](#) are not masked during the exposure period.
 - These schools may still elect to use a 10-day school-based quarantine period, but the [close contacts](#) **MUST** wear face masks during the full 10-day quarantine and remain without symptoms to align with MCDPH guidance.

*Early Care and Education/Childcare Programs (including childcare/daycare centers, home-based programs, Head Start, and other pre-kindergarten programs)

- Children in these programs should follow MCDPH [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) guidance.
- CDC has additional guidance for [Operating Early Care and Education/Childcare \(ECE\) Programs](#).
- Preschool-aged children in an ECE program who are identified as [close contacts](#) of someone with COVID-19 **AND** should [quarantine](#) per MCDPH guidance **AND** can wear a [well-fitting face mask](#) may attend their program **DURING** quarantine as long as they (1) remain **without symptoms** of COVID-19 **AND** (2) are masked or 6 feet apart from other children at all times for 10 days following their last exposure.
 - While napping, children in quarantine should not be masked and should be placed at least 6 feet away from others.
 - While eating and drinking, children in quarantine should be at least 6 feet away from others.
- **Children under the age of 2 and should not wear a mask (per CDC) and those who cannot consistently wear a mask should complete 10 days of [quarantine](#) at home.** They may end [quarantine](#) after 7 days, if they test negative between days 5–7 following their last exposure. If untested, they should not return to preschool until after 10 days.
- Per [MCDPH guidance](#), if a child is up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations **OR** has had a confirmed COVID-19 infection in the last 90 days they do not need to quarantine. They should be monitored for symptoms for 10 days and be tested around 5 days after their last exposure.

Return to School after COVID-19 Exposure

	Quarantine Policy	School-wide Face Coverings Required	Case Masked During Exposure	Exposed Contact Masked During Exposure	Contact Wears Mask at School During 10-day Quarantine Regardless of Vaccination Status
Lower	5-Day At-home Quarantine + 5 Days Masked per CDC guidance	Yes	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
	10-day School-based Quarantine for Asymptomatic Contacts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	10-day School-based Quarantine for Asymptomatic Contacts	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	10-day School-based Quarantine for Asymptomatic Contacts	No	No	Yes	Yes
	10-day School-based Quarantine for Asymptomatic Contacts	No	No	No	Yes
Higher	10-day School-based Quarantine for Asymptomatic Contacts	Quarantine in school without wearing a mask is NOT recommended			