



# State of Louisiana

## Louisiana Department of Health

### Office of Public Health

October 1, 2021

Dear System Leaders,

The Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health (LDH/OPH) has received specific inquiries regarding COVID-19 isolation and quarantine instructions for students and staff of K-12 schools, and general inquiries about current policy following a recent change in posture from the Louisiana Department of Education. The public health recommendations of LDH/OPH on this issue have not changed and remained aligned with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The description below details current CDC and LDH/OPH recommendations for isolation and quarantine guidelines in K-12 settings.

#### Isolation

- For people who are **infected** with SARS-CoV-2 (with or without COVID-19 symptoms)
- Applies to **both** fully vaccinated and not fully vaccinated people

#### Duration:

- People may end isolation 10 days after symptom onset (or 10 days after the date of the first positive SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR test result for people who don't have symptoms) **AND** after resolution of fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications and with improvement of other symptoms

#### Quarantine

- For asymptomatic individuals who may have been in **close contact** to someone infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus
  - o Close contact: within 6 feet of someone infected with SARS-CoV-2 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period
    - Instances when quarantine exemptions may be safely implemented (i.e., under the following criteria quarantine is not necessary):
      - Individuals who are fully vaccinated (i.e.,  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or  $\geq 2$  following receipt of one dose in a single dose vaccine) at the time of exposure and remain asymptomatic
      - Individuals who previously tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days and remain asymptomatic
      - If both the positive case and the contact were masked **AND** were  $\geq 3$  feet of each other and remain asymptomatic (only applies to students in structured K-12 settings)

#### Duration:

The standard length is 14 days; however, schools can choose to use shortened quarantine options. Options to shorten quarantine include:

- If no symptoms develop during quarantine **AND** they have a negative antigen or PCR/molecular test collected on day 5, 6, or 7 after last exposure: they may quarantine for 7 days from last contact with a COVID-19 case **OR**
- If no symptoms develop during quarantine and no testing is done: they may quarantine for 10 days from last contact with a COVID-19 case

At this time, data do not support modified quarantine options other than the shortened duration options listed above. Roughly 50% of COVID-19 infections may be asymptomatic, where the infected individual has no discernable

symptoms yet can still transmit the virus to others. In addition, infected individuals that do develop symptoms are able to spread the virus to others two days before symptoms appear. This is why quarantine of close contacts to a case of COVID-19 is so important for controlling transmission. OPH encourages all schools to promote safety for in-person learning by strictly adhering to isolation and quarantine best practices.

Enacting policies that do not align with public health guidance increases the risk for spread of COVID-19 in schools and jeopardizes the health and well-being of students, staff and visitors that may be exposed to COVID-19 as a result. COVID-19 continues to circulate at extremely high levels throughout Louisiana, and the highest number of cases is occurring among those younger than 18 years of age. Since the beginning of August, 25% of all new COVID-19 cases in Louisiana have occurred among children.

Tragically, an increase in severe illnesses and deaths related to COVID-19 is also occurring among Louisiana children. During the Delta surge alone, 96 cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) resulting from COVID-19 have been reported among Louisiana children. Children with MIS-C become severely ill and require hospitalization. OPH has also seen an increase in COVID-19 pediatric deaths during the Delta surge. Just today, in fact, OPH reported another COVID-associated pediatric death - the 8<sup>th</sup> COVID-associated pediatric death that has occurred since mid-August.

Unfortunately, very few school-age children are currently protected by the COVID-19 vaccine. As you know, a vaccine is not yet authorized for children 5-11 years of age, and currently only 29% of 12-17 years olds are fully vaccinated. Because the majority of school-age children in Louisiana are not yet vaccinated, other prevention measures, including isolation and quarantine become even more important for controlling the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

School-aged children have also proven to be effective vectors of COVID-19 and can easily bring the virus home to their families and spread it to adult relatives who may be at increased risk for severe complications. It is of paramount importance that Louisiana schools continue to follow the quarantine recommendations outlined in LDH/OPH and CDC guidance in order to safeguard the health of K-12 students, staff, and their respective families.

The concept of allowing parents to decide whether their exposed child will quarantine has been suggested as a viable option in K-12 settings. However, from a public health perspective it is not viable as it fails to provide adequate protection to other students and teachers/staff and also confers risk of transmission to their respective families. Quarantine is not designed to protect the close contact themselves as this child has already been exposed. The purpose of quarantine is to prevent the close contact from exposing others in the event they develop infection. The decision to quarantine cannot rest with parents of children who are at risk of spreading the disease to others; this would deprive other parents of any option to protect their children from exposure. In order to effectively curb COVID-19 transmission in schools, quarantine policies must be based on the best available evidence for disease control, not personal preference.

In order to provide further clarification about quarantine recommendations, my team and I will host a webinar for system superintendents and school leaders in order to review current guidance and address questions. This webinar will be held next week, and an invite will be shared upon confirmation of the date and time. In addition, the Regional Offices of Public Health are available to provide support and guidance to K-12 schools. Many thanks for all you do to promote health and safety in Louisiana schools.

Sincerely,



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