



Comprehensive K-12 School Guidance

I. Overview

The widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccines, high levels of vaccination and immunity, increased access to testing, and effective treatments have significantly reduced the risk of severe COVID-19 disease, hospitalization, and death. These developments have enabled schools to maintain in-person learning and focus on their primary mission: optimizing the educational experience of students. The K-12 school guidance is based on the best available evidence to support healthy learning environments and will continue to be updated as new information becomes available. While this guidance is specific to COVID-19 prevention, many of the strategies help prevent the spread of other common infectious diseases such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and norovirus.

Although COVID-19 clusters and outbreaks occur in school settings, [multiple studies](#) have shown that transmission rates within school settings are typically lower than or similar to community transmission levels when multiple layered prevention strategies are in place. The Hawai'i Department of Health (HDOH) COVID-19 Guidance for K-12 schools is intentionally layered, flexible, and aligned with [CDC's Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools](#). Each school is different and not every strategy can be practically implemented at every school.

Summary of Changes for June 2023

Removed mitigation strategies list and refer schools directly to www.CDC.gov

Adjusted language related to cluster and outbreak reporting to clarify the differences for schools

Removed sections that are no longer part of state response: community levels notifications and specific types of testing

II. General Mitigation Strategies that Reduce the Spread of COVID-19

[CDC's Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning](#) provides current recommendations on mitigation strategies for schools, including:

- Staying Up to Date on Vaccines
- Staying Home When Sick
- Ventilation
- Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

- Cleaning
- Masking
- Testing
- Management of Cases and Exposures
- Responding to Outbreaks

School representatives should review the site when responding to cases as it provides additional case and exposure management guidelines and recommendations that complement the information in this document. Additionally, it provides considerations for specific situations include K-12 residential dorms, overnight childcare, and high-risk activities. Hawai'i Department of Health continues to work with schools to provide specific guidance related to identification of cases, clusters, and potential outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools.

III. Specific Mitigation Strategies for COVID-19 Cases, Clusters, and Outbreaks in Hawai'i

The definitions of clusters and outbreaks provide schools with an algorithm for response and mitigation on campuses. Based on specific counts of positive cases and students with symptoms, schools can implement a tiered response.

Preparing for COVID-19 Cases

- Review **When a Person at a K-12 School Has COVID-19.**
- Each school should set up an account on the reporting tool provided by HDOH.
- Schools should be prepared to:
 - **Report suspected outbreaks to the HDOH.**
 - Report school cases of COVID-19 to their institutions if required by policy or law.
 - Consider group notification, to the extent allowable by applicable privacy laws, to staff and families of students when exposed to a person with COVID-19 as soon as possible (i.e., the same day) if students and staff stay in the same space (e.g., class) throughout the day.

Students or Staff Who Become Sick at School

- Immediately separate the sick person from others at the school.
- Individuals who are sick should immediately go home or to a healthcare provider based on symptom severity.
- Individuals who are sick should wear a face mask, if possible.
- Identify an isolation area to separate anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms.
 - Ensure students are isolated in a non-threatening manner, within the line of sight of an adult, and only as long as necessary.
 - Ensure staff managing sick students or employees are appropriately protected from potential exposure to COVID-19.
 - Staff caring for a sick student or staff should be provided appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including an N95 respirator or equivalent (or double masking with a surgical and tight-fitting cloth mask if a respirator is not available) and follow [standard and transmission-based precautions](#).

- Gloves, gowns, and face shields are **not** routinely required, but consider using during interactions with a student or employee who is actively coughing or with special medical needs.
- Refer to CDC guidance on [When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility](#) for guidance on appropriate cleaning and disinfection procedures after a case is identified.

Responding to COVID-19 Cases

- See [When a Person at a K-12 School Has COVID-19](#) and [Isolation and Exposure Guidance for K-12 Schools](#).
- Students and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should isolate at home. Students and staff with symptoms should continue to test.
- Student athletes should be cleared for return to sport when fever free for a minimum of 24 hours and symptom free. Athletes are recommended to communicate with their athletic trainer for a return to sport plan. If there is a positive COVID-19 test, follow current recommendations from AAP. Any symptoms during return to sport should be reported to the athletic trainer.
- See [Isolation and Exposure Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) for criteria on return to school*.
- Schools should **not** require a clinician’s note to return to school if the person has completed 5 days of isolation and meets the conditions above.
 - Schools should not need to require a negative COVID-19 test if the person has completed 5 days of isolation and meets the conditions above.

Notification of Potentially Exposed Individuals

- Schools should consider group notification or broader school notification of potentially exposed individuals.
- For students and staff who stay in the same space (e.g., class) throughout the day, schools should consider the following:
 - Notify group members with exposure as soon as possible.
 - Advise groups members to (1) immediately mask for five days; (2) test if symptomatic; (3) watch for symptoms; and (4) test on day 6 after exposure even if asymptomatic.

COVID-19 School Cluster or Outbreak Response

The definitions of clusters and outbreaks provide schools with an algorithm for response and mitigation on campuses. If a school has a suspected cluster of cases or an outbreak, additional mitigation strategies may be recommended to prevent ongoing spread. Schools that want additional guidance on mitigation strategies related to clusters of cases or outbreaks should contact HDOH. If schools need technical assistance with a cluster of cases or outbreak, call the Disease Reporting Line at 808-586-4586 for additional guidance.

Cluster	Three (3) or more students, teachers, or staff who have confirmed or probable COVID-19 and are within a specified core group* in a 14-day period** as long as those cases do not have suspected exposure elsewhere (i.e. they are not close contacts of persons with COVID-19 outside the school setting). Identifying clusters of people with COVID-19 does not necessarily mean that exposure or spread has occurred in school or at the associated event.
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Outbreak	<p>Infection outbreaks are defined by related confirmed or probable cases that meet or exceed these percentages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absentee rate exceeds 10% for entire school; or • Absentee rate exceeds 20% of one grade or class.
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*A “core group” includes, but is not limited to, extracurricular activity†, classroom, before or after school care, bus riders.

**Persons have symptom onset or a positive test result (whichever comes first) within 14 days of each other.

†A school sanctioned extracurricular activity is defined as a voluntary activity sponsored by the school or local education agency (LEA) or an organization sanctioned by the LEA. Extracurricular activities include, but are not limited to, preparation for and involvement in public performances, contests, athletic competitions, demonstrations, displays, and club activities.

Cluster Response

The cluster definition is provided as a threshold to help schools identify when **increased mitigation strategies would be beneficial**. Reporting of identified clusters to HDOH is **not** required but can be performed if technical assistance is desired.

Outbreak Response

- Schools are **required to report potential outbreaks of COVID-19 or influenza-like illness** to the HDOH when daily absentee rates due to suspected illness meet or exceed these thresholds:
 - Absentee rate exceeds 10% for entire school; **or**
 - Absentee rate exceeds 20% of one grade or class.

Recommended Mitigation Strategies for Clusters and Outbreaks

- Schools should notify all impacted staff and students (i.e., parent/guardian(s) of a student) of a suspected cluster of cases or outbreak.
- Implement universal or targeted indoor masking at the appropriate level (e.g., class or grade) while the cluster or outbreak is ongoing and for 10 full days after the last exposure. Recommend testing for all students and staff potentially involved in a cluster of cases or outbreak.
 - Ideally, test upon identifying that an exposure occurred, and again at least 5 full days after last exposure
- A cluster of cases or an outbreak may necessitate targeted case investigation and contact identification to stop COVID-19 spread. HDOH will work with schools to conduct disease investigations when potential outbreaks are reported.
- Move activities, classes, and meals outdoors when circumstances allow.
- Avoid crowding.
- Suspend associated high-risk sports and extracurricular activities.