

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Don Semon
Director

3057 Briw Road, Suite B
Placerville, CA 95667




AGENCY DIVISIONS

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To: El Dorado County School Superintendents
c/o El Dorado County Office of Education

From: Nancy Williams, MD, MPH
Public Health Officer 

Subject: FAQ for school mandates vs. recommendations

I provide this document as a supplement to the California Department of Public Health's [K-12 guidance](#) and [FAQ](#), which are the guiding documents for El Dorado County and all California schools. The intention is for this to be a clarifying document. There should be no conflict between state and local guidelines. Local (county) health officers may be more strict than state guidelines (by issuing our own orders for our residents) but not less strict.

This document relates to students only. It does not relate to staff, including teachers, who are subject to the guidelines of Cal/OSHA. For both students and staff, even following the guidelines strictly may not prevent all transmissions of the COVID-19 virus. Likewise, regardless of whether protective measures are required or recommended, following them should reduce the chances of avoiding additional illnesses. Therefore, for any measure that is recommended rather than required, if students and their families are able to follow them, that approach is still recommended.

The fact that the general public's universal masking order is being allowed to expire after February 15 (reverting to the 2021 rules where fully vaccinated people may be in indoor public spaces without masks, based on self-attestation of vaccination status, while people not fully vaccinated must still wear masks) does not mean the COVID-19 threat has ended. Rather, it reflects the gradual transition that has already begun. The state is issuing fewer mandates in lieu of greater expectations that the public understands how to prevent most COVID-19 illness transmission and will act responsibly to protect others and knows how to protect themselves against becoming infected as well.

The [state's school guidelines](#) include two requirements: 1) that schools report all positive cases to their public health agencies and 2) that universal masking continue for all students and staff through the end of the '21-'22 school year. With many other requirements having been lifted or relaxed, such as the addition of the [option of group tracing](#) in lieu of in-school contact tracing and elimination of physical distancing requirements, and with masking having been proven to be one of the most effective measures to reduce spread of COVID-19, keeping masking in place makes good sense.

Finally, while the Omicron surge seems to be on the decline, with new variants or surges having occurred every few months through the pandemic, it makes sense to maintain masking, due to its effectiveness, through the end of the school year. **The goal is to keep kids safely in the classroom.**

Vision Statement:
Transforming Lives and Improving Futures

Frequently Asked Questions about Student Quarantine Guidelines

1. Under what circumstances should a student who has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 remain quarantined at home?

The school guidance does not *require* quarantine, regardless of whether a school continues to follow the [original guidelines](#) (see Sections 7-9) or the alternate [group-tracing approach](#), although it may be *recommended*. Most importantly, students who develop symptoms following exposures should begin isolating at home immediately. (See FAQ #5.)

Of note, El Dorado County Public Health staff may learn of out-of-school exposures through case investigations of other county residents, for example, a student's parent may have tested positive. In those situations, especially ones where isolation of the infected family member at home has not occurred, likely already having resulted in extensive exposure to the student at home, *Public Health staff may sometimes order students to quarantine*. (They may be able to test out of quarantine early per [CDPH Isolation and Quarantine guidelines](#), Table 2, which will be explained by Public Health staff.)

2. Are asymptomatic exposed students required to test for COVID-19 in order to remain at school?

No. Testing of asymptomatic exposed students is *strongly encouraged*, 3 to 5 days after exposure but not required. Identifying asymptomatic infections can help prevent transmission of COVID-19 within the classroom and prevent exposed students from becoming sick and having to miss school. **The goal is to keep kids safely in the classroom.**

3. Does vaccination status affect the determination as to whether or not a student is recommended to be quarantined after exposure?

No. Quarantine recommendations are the same for both situations. (Refer to the first two links in FAQ #1 above.) Although unvaccinated people are at greatest risk, the Omicron variant of the virus also infects a number of vaccinated people.

4. Does the setting in which the exposure occurred affect the determination as to whether or not a student is recommended to be quarantined after exposure?

It might. In-school exposures are typically low risk due to other measures being in place. (Refer to FAQ #1.) However, in cases where El Dorado County Public Health staff learns of students who have been exposed outside the classroom, higher risk situations may be identified that merit quarantine. These would most likely be situations where students have been extensively exposed to infected family members during their family members' illnesses where the family members did not or could not adequately isolate from the students within their households, putting the students at high risk of becoming infected. Those highly at risk students could put multiple classmates at risk of becoming sick and missing school. **The goal is to keep kids safely in the classroom.**

Parents are likely to be aware of out-of-school exposures a day or more before Public Health staff learn about them. Early intervention can stop the chain of transmission, so parents should not wait to hear from Public Health staff when considering whether to quarantine their children (or themselves) after exposures. Risks from exposures outside the school setting are often greater than those in school. If a child had a high-risk exposure, such as having spent significant face-to-face time with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, the parent may want to quarantine the child,

including keeping him or her out of school, to protect other students as well as the student's own family members.

5. What is the guidance if a student becomes symptomatic?

Becoming symptomatic means students should stay home from school. (This is not “quarantine”. It is “isolation”. Terms aside, the important thing to remember is the general advice: Stay home when you are sick. This applies to both adults and kids.) When a student develops symptoms, testing for COVID is *strongly recommended* but not mandatory. Even if the test is negative, the student should remain isolated at home until symptoms have improved and the student has had no fever for at least 24 hours. (These standards were already in place with regard to respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses prior to the pandemic. We do not want sick kids in school.)

It is also *recommended but not mandatory* that symptomatic but recovering students be tested again before returning to school, to be sure the result remains negative, to prevent inadvertent exposures to classmates who could become sick and also need to miss school. **The goal is to keep kids safely in the classroom.**

(Refer to Section 4 of [CDPH K-12 Guidance](#) for exposed students who develop symptoms.)

For more details on quarantine recommendations for students, please see [CDPH's FAQ](#). (Refer to Questions 7-13 and 21.)

Thank you.

