

Mask to Stay/Test to Play

ODH released a new option for K-12 COVID-19 guidance on 10/25/2021. This option was intended to increase the number of students participating in in-person classroom activities. We have received several questions. The following information is provided to assist LHDs in understanding the guidance and provide consistency across jurisdictions.

Please remember that the existing best practices of layering mitigation strategies (encouraging vaccination, mask wearing, and physical distancing) within the classroom setting should continue to be utilized to reduce the risk of transmission and keep our children and our communities safe.

*Mask to Stay and Test to Play cannot be interchanged. To participate in extracurricular activities, the contact **MUST** be tested. The new guidelines can be applied to any school-related (school-sanctioned) activity. They **DO NOT** apply to household or community exposures, which is specified within the guidance.*

A. What is the definition of school-related?

School-sanctioned activities are included within the definition. This includes lunch, recess, and school-sponsored extracurricular activities, such as sports and clubs. When the setting is a true classroom setting, (examples are band, choir, gym) that takes place during the school day and is considered a true class, Mask-to-Stay guidance can be followed. In order to participate in **any** extracurricular activities, the requirements of Test to Play must be met.

B. Who is eligible for Mask-to-Stay?

- Exposures during sports or school-related after-school activities are eligible for the Mask to Stay, Test to Play quarantine alternative.
- These requirements are specific to individuals who would otherwise be subject to quarantine.
- Vaccinated students who are asymptomatic are not recommended to quarantine should be tested 5-7 days after exposure to reduce the risk of asymptomatic spread. This recommendation is separate from Test to Play.
- Exposures within an extracurricular activity are not eligible for previous quarantine exemptions. However, if someone would be subject to quarantine following an exposure during an extracurricular activity, they can remain in in-person school and participate in extracurricular activities under the Mask to Stay/Test to Play alternative if they adhere to the specified guidelines (mask wearing and testing).

C. Can the guidance be applied to other settings (e.g., daycares, private kindergartens in daycares, business, etc.)?

Mask to Stay, Test to Play is only applicable to the K-12 school setting. It cannot be applied to daycare centers or preschools, including preschools at K-12 or private kindergarten in daycare

centers. Individuals outside of the K-12 school setting and exposures that occur outside of this environment should be handled using the general community guidance. Individuals who are exposed outside of the school environment should follow normal quarantine procedures.

D. Are there additional specifics on testing for Test to Play? How immediate is immediate? What if a contact is identified 5 or more days after exposure? What if the first test is missed or refused?

- If the student was exposed within the classroom environment, the existing K-12 Quarantine guidance should be used to determine whether any additional follow-up is needed.
- If a student is exposed within the extracurricular/sports setting, the quarantine alternatives can be implemented: the contact should wear a mask to the greatest extent possible and be tested immediately upon being identified as a contact and again 5-7 days following exposure.
- Provided the contact remains asymptomatic, wears a mask, and is negative on testing, they can continue to participate in sports throughout the “quarantine alternative” period.
- A self-test reported test through the Navica app does not qualify. Only tests that are truly proctored (observed at the time of testing) and reported meet the qualification for Test to Play.
- Under Test to Play, the contact must be tested immediately upon identified as a contact (within 24 hours). If a contact is not identified until 5 or more days after exposure, a single test may be used to allow the individual to continue to participate in extracurricular activities.
- If the initial test is not performed, then the contact is not eligible to participate in Test to Play and cannot participate in extracurricular activities until they have completed their quarantine period (a 7-day reduced duration quarantine with a negative viral test performed 5-7 days after exposure is applicable for all contacts).
- If tests are refused, the student is not eligible to participate in Test-to-Play and should be excluded from extracurricular activities for the duration of their quarantine.

E. Do special considerations need to be taken at lunch for students enrolled in the Mask to Stay/Test to Play alternative?

Schools should be aware and consider that environments where masking cannot be maintained, such as the lunchroom, are higher risk for transmission. They should maximize physical distancing, make efforts to improve ventilation, and reduce mixing of students to the greatest extent possible. This should be done as general best practice and is not specific to students within the Mask to Stay/Test to Play alternative.

F. Are there specific distancing requirements/ length of exposure requirements associated with the Mask to Stay/Test to Play alternative?

- There is not a physical distancing requirement within Mask to Stay. ODH continues to recommend physical distancing of no less than 3 feet between desks as a primary prevention strategy.

- The “Mask to Stay/Test to Play” quarantine alternatives can be applied to exposures in school-related activities when quarantine would have been recommended under previous guidance. For example, if a student was unmasked in the classroom, and previously subject to at-home quarantine, they would now be able to remain in school provided they wear a mask as specified in the guidance.
- Please remember that the existing best practices of layering mitigation strategies (encouraging vaccination, mask wearing, and physical distancing) within the classroom setting should continue to be utilized to reduce the risk of transmission and keep our children and our communities safe.

G. Can students continue to participate in extracurricular activities while waiting for the test results in Test to Play?

Yes, if the individual continues to wear a mask as much as possible and remains symptom free, they can continue to participate in school activities while awaiting test results.

H. Do students who are participating in Mask to Stay/Test to Play need to quarantine when outside of the school environment?

- Students and adults within K-12 schools who are identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 should be notified of their exposure based on normal public health and school policies.
- Such notifications help ensure that families can make informed decisions for activities which occur outside of the classroom setting, including interaction with vulnerable populations—particularly people who are at [higher risk of severe illness](#).
- The “Mask to Stay/Test to Play” guidance only applies to exposures that occurred within a school-related activity and only allows continued participation in school-related activities. Quarantine outside of school-related activities should be continued.

I. If a student did not choose to get tested immediately upon being notified, can they get tested later and join Test to Play?

- Testing upon identification of a close contact is a general CDC recommendation for individuals who are not fully vaccinated and helps to rapidly identify individuals who may be infected and asymptomatic.
- Testing should occur as quickly as possible following identification as a close contact, but no later than 24 hours following identification/notification. If the contact is not tested within this time frame, they are not eligible for the Test to Play modification and are not eligible to continue participating in extracurricular activities during their quarantine period.
- If a contact is not identified until 5 or more days following last exposure, a single test can be sufficient.
- Contact tracing efforts should not be delayed as individuals may convert quickly, and delayed identification can increase the risk of additional spread from asymptomatic, infected individuals.

G. Has the definition of close contact/direct contact or the guidance on quarantine changed?

- The direct contact definition has not changed. Please see the [Infectious Disease Control Manual](#) for additional guidance on defining close contacts.
- Under the reduced quarantine options, it has always been advised to symptom monitor and mask (to the greatest extent possible) for 14 days. It is important to remember that the incubation period of SARS-CoV-2 has not changed and can extend up to 14 days. The reduced duration quarantine options were introduced to balance the risk of post-quarantine transmission with the burden of the full 14-day quarantine period. Following any exposure, close contacts should be advised to monitor for symptoms for the full 14 days and to wear a mask, to the greatest extent possible, for that full period.

H. Is there any type of messaging to provide schools to address the concern that there are no incentives to be vaccinated in school settings?

Vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent against SARS-CoV-2 infection and ODH continues to support vaccination through a variety of means, including Vax-2-School. We understand that not all families will choose to vaccinate at this time, and the Mask to Stay/Test to Play quarantine alternative is provided as a balance to support our communities overall health and wellness.

I. Does this impact reporting? We are concerned about the administrative burden that may occur associated with this.

- No, this data does not impact reporting of close contacts to the LHD. Close contacts should still be tracked by the school and reported to the LHD.
- These students should still be enrolled in symptom monitoring and families should receive notice of the exposure.
- We understand the burden the COVID-19 pandemic has created for local public health and school districts. These recommendations are provided to help promote and safe learning environment for Ohio's students. ODH is working with CDC Foundation to provide additional assistance. There will be more to come on this soon

J. Can the students take breaks or remove masks if they are more than 6 ft apart?

Under Mask to Stay, contacts should wear their masks consistently and correctly throughout the school day and during extracurricular activities.