Interim Guidance for Implementing Test to Stay in K-12 Schools

January 1, 2022

Test to Stay (TTS) combines contact tracing and serial testing to allow asymptomatic school-associated close contacts who are not fully vaccinated and do not test positive for SARS-CoV-2 to continue in-person learning. If schools are considering implementing TTS, they should also have robust contact tracing in place and access to testing resources (for example, testing supplies and personnel to conduct testing, or access to an existing community testing site), among other layered prevention strategies.

CDC recommends that everyone ages 5 years and older get a COVID-19 vaccine to help protect against COVID-19. Adolescents ages 16 years and older should get a booster shot at least six months after a primary series. Vaccination continues to be the best strategy to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and these recommendations are intended to help support schools in reducing disruptions to in-person learning as vaccines for younger school-age children are being rolled out.

Schools may use a TTS modified quarantine protocol that allows asymptomatic unvaccinated students who were exposed to a person with COVID-19 in any school setting[1] where students are supervised by school staff (indoors, outdoors, or on a school buses) to continue in-person academic activities that are part of the regular school curriculum and provided during school hours. Students participating in TTS are required to comply with enhanced testing and masking recommendations and should quarantine when not in school.

This document outlines guidance from NJDOH on how schools can implement a TTS modified quarantine based on data released by CDC; it does not signify a recommendation or a requirement for schools to implement this testing option. Schools should work with their local health department when responding to cases of COVID-19 in school settings and assess risk to students and staff based on COVID-19 spread in their geographic area, and capacity of nursing and other staff to implement such protocols, in order to inform any decisions made on whether and how to implement a TTS program. It is critical that school districts that choose to implement TTS ensure strict compliance with other layered prevention strategies, particularly masking. School districts that choose not to adopt a TTS program or individuals who elect not to participate should continue to follow the existing guidance for exclusion of close contacts in K-12 schools.

Please note that these guidelines are subject to change as additional data become available.

In order to implement TTS protocols, schools should:

- Obtain advanced consent for testing of students.
- Ensure that individuals conducting school-based testing complete training on specimen collection and interpretation of results per manufacturer's instructions.
- Obtain a CLIA waiver if the school is performing on-site testing. A CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments) certificate of waiver is necessary to administer, process, and read COVID-19 tests on school grounds. The entity administering tests (whether school or vendor) must have a CLIA certification of waiver. For example, if the testing is administered by the

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[1] Any exposure that occurs outside of the school setting does not meet eligibility criteria.

vendor, the vendor must obtain a CLIA certification of waiver. If the testing is administered by the school, the school must obtain a CLIA certification of waiver. If a LEA or non-public school contracts with a CLIA certified vendor, the school does not need its own, separate CLIA certification of waiver.

- Report individual test results electronically to public health department and to the individual who provided consent.
- Inform Local Health Department when students are participating in Test to Stay modified quarantine.

Eligibility

Participation in TTS modified quarantine protocol should be limited to unvaccinated/not fully vaccinated K-12 students who:

- Do not have any signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Meet the criteria of a close contact[2] of a confirmed COVID-19 case where the exposure occurred in a school setting **and both case and contact were observed to be fully masked at time of exposure**.
    - o TTS is not applicable to exposures that occur outside of school or in the community (e.g., in a household, sports team, social activity).
- Are able and willing to follow the below modified quarantine and testing protocols with parental consent (if applicable).
- Are not exempt from masking under EO 251.

Alternatives to Test to Stay

NJDOH standard recommendations for exclusion of unvaccinated individuals who are asymptomatic and close contacts of staff or students with COVID-19 apply unless a school finds it necessary to utilize TTS modified quarantine for students who have consent to participate.

Test to Stay Protocol

Schools should ensure that eligible students participating in TTS program adhere to the following protocols:

- Wear a mask indoors and outdoors at all times when at school (except for eating/drinking) for the entirety of Test to Stay program (up to and including the last day of the recommended quarantine even if all test results are negative).
    - o The mask should fit securely over the nose and mouth.
    - o When masks are removed for eating/drinking, it's imperative that students should be at least 6 feet from other students.
- Quarantine when not at school and refrain from all extracurricular activities.

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[2] Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with suspected or known COVID-19 for 15 or more minutes during a 24-hour period. In the K–12 indoor classroom setting or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with educator supervision), the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.

- o **Exception:** Students may participate in school extracurricular activities that take place in a structured (e.g., classroom) indoor or outdoor setting where masking and physical distancing can be strictly adhered to and enforced.
- Monitor for symptoms daily until 14 days after their last exposure to someone with COVID-19.
- Comply with the TTS testing protocol.

Test to Stay Testing Protocol

- Testing should occur at the school using a rapid antigen test performed by a licensed healthcare provider or trained personnel under a CLIA-waiver or at a school district coordinated offsite location that provides rapid testing that is accessible to students.
    - o For schools conducting screening testing, students following a TTS modified quarantine should follow the TTS testing frequency outlined below. All tests conducted according to the TTS protocol would fulfill the screening testing requirements.
- Testing frequency:
    - o Students should be tested immediately following the notification of being a close contact. If notification occurs after school hours, the student should be tested the following morning at school prior to attending in-person instruction.
    - o After the first negative test result, the student may continue to attend in-person instruction and then submit to testing every other day until the end of the quarantine timeframe with the last test being performed on the final day of quarantine or next school day (if weekend/holiday).
        - ▪ If testing would fall on the weekend or a school holiday based on this schedule, testing must occur in school on Monday or the day following the holiday.
    - o If the final test result is negative, no further TTS testing is required; students would be permitted to resume normal activities the day after completing quarantine but should continue to monitor for symptoms through Day 14.
- If any student tests positive for COVID-19, the student should be immediately excluded from school for the recommended isolation period from the date of the positive test. The school should identify the student's in-school close contacts and either immediately test those students for COVID-19 or exclude them from school until they are tested. If negative, those contacts can follow protocols or traditional quarantine/exclusion guidance.
- If a student develops COVID-19 symptoms, the student should be excluded from school and referred for diagnostic testing, following NJDOH guidelines for school exclusion.
- TTS should be suspended in certain outbreak settings (i.e., where close contacts cannot be readily identified) in consultation with local health departments.

Additional considerations

- TTS may be most appropriate for school settings where students are cohorted in a single classroom or grade and are not mixing with other students.
- TTS may not be appropriate for all in-school exposures. It is reasonable to consider additional factors to determine whether the exposure presents higher risk, such as:
    - o Inconsistent use of masks or other layered prevention strategies in the setting.
    - o Total number of cumulative days of exposure (e.g., infectious individual only present in school 1- 2 days during infectious period vs. an entire week).

- o Participation in activities that are high risk for disease transmission (e.g., singing, shouting, playing wind instruments).

Reporting Test Results

- All healthcare providers and laboratories performing COVID-19 testing, including K-12 schools, are required to report all COVID-19 laboratory test results, both positive and negative, electronically to public health authorities. While tests that are performed in a laboratory must be reported into the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS), Point of Care (POC) tests, which includes those that would be administered as part of the TTS program, may either be reported through SimpleReport or CDRSS. Schools that are currently successfully reporting POC results via CDRSS may continue to do so. Those who are not currently using CDRSS will likely find that SimpleReport is an easier, more user-friendly alternative for POC reporting.
  - o SimpleReport: To get started, schools providing testing should go to https://simplereport.gov/, click on Getting Started, and Onboard your Organization. Online user support and training resources are available, including a user guide and videos. SimpleReport is managed and coordinated by CDC who provides support for users having problems logging in or who have other questions about using SimpleReport.
  - o CDRSS: New users should go to https://cdrs.doh.state.nj.us/cdrss/login/loginPage/ and select the Quick Start Option for COVID-19 Training. Questions about reporting into CDRSS should be sent to cdrs.admin@doh.nj.gov.
- Reporting of metrics from the use of a TTS modified quarantine should occur separately through a Novi Survey that will be shared by DOH. Schools will be responsible for reporting each week:
  - o The **number of students** who have participated in TTS for that week.
  - o The **number of tests** performed as part of TTS for that week.
  - o The **number of positive tests** in TTS for that week.
  - o The **day post-exposure** on which a positive test was received for students participating in TTS for that week.

Reporting Suspected Outbreaks

- Schools should report a cluster or suspected outbreak of COVID-19 by telephone, immediately to their local health department.

CDC Resources

- Test to Stay Options Can Help Keep Students in School During Covid-19
- Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs – Updated
- What You Should Know About COVID-19 Testing in Schools

- *MMWR* - Evaluation of Test to Stay Strategy on Secondary and Tertiary Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K–12 Schools — Lake County, Illinois, August 9–October 29, 2021 - *Weekly* / December 31, 2021 / 70(5152);1778–1781
- *MMWR* - Evaluation of a Test to Stay Strategy in Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Schools — Los Angeles County, California, August 16–October 31, 2021 - *Weekly* / December 31, 2021 / 70(5152);1773–1777