

Exclusion from school for positive COVID cases is **required** following the specific criteria and exemptions listed in the table below.

Table 1. Scenarios for Managing COVID-19 Cases in K-12 Schools

| Exclusion Category | Scenario | Criteria to return to school |
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| Diagnosis | Person has tested positive with an antigen test but does not have symptoms of COVID-19 and is not known to be a close contact to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. | <p>If the person has a repeat PCR/molecular test performed in a laboratory within 24 – 48 hours of their positive antigen test, and that PCR/ molecular test is negative: the positive antigen test can be considered a false positive and the person can immediately return to school.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>If the person does not have a repeat PCR/molecular test, or has one within 24 – 48 hours and it is also positive, the person can return to school 5 days after the specimen collection date of the first positive test, as long as they did not develop symptoms. The person should wear a well-fitting mask through day 10 to minimize risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person may remove their mask sooner with 2 sequential negative tests 48 hours apart.</p> |
| Diagnosis | Person has tested positive with a PCR/molecular test , but the person does not have symptoms. | <p>Person can return to school 5 days after the specimen collection date of their positive test if they did not develop symptoms. The person should wear a well-fitting mask through day 10 to minimize risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative tests 48 hours apart.</p> |
| Symptoms | Person has symptoms of COVID-19 <u>and</u> has tested positive with an antigen test or PCR/molecular test | <p>Person can return to school when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been at least 5 days after the first day of symptoms; AND • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving. <p>The person should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the first day of symptoms to minimize the risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative tests 48 hours apart.</p> |

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| Symptoms | Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been tested for COVID-19 nor has visited a health care provider. Therefore, the person who has symptoms is presumed positive for COVID-19 due to the presence of a clinically compatible illness in the absence of testing. | <p>Person can return to school when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been at least 5 days after the first day of symptoms; AND • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving. <p>The person should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the first day of symptoms to minimize the risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative tests 48 hours apart.</p> |
| Symptoms | Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has received a negative PCR/molecular test for COVID-19 or has visited a health care provider and received an alternate diagnosis that would explain the symptoms of COVID-19 | <p>Person can return to school when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been at least 24 hours since the person had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • They have felt well for at least 24 hours. <p>Note: The health care provider is not required to detail the specifics of the alternate diagnosis.</p> |

*For individuals exposed, day of exposure is considered day zero (0). For cases, day of symptom onset is day zero (0) or for individuals without symptoms, day of specimen collection is considered day zero (0).

Management of Individuals Potentially Exposed to COVID-19:

Contact tracing is no longer recommended statewide in K-12 schools; it remains an important option in situations identified in the NC DHHS Guidance for Case Investigation/Contact Tracing Prioritization, such as a school-associated cluster. Schools should partner with local health officials to decide how to manage exposures based on the local context and benefits of preserving access to in-person learning.

Using the [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) and community or setting-specific context, such as availability of resources, health status of students, and age of population served, schools may choose to notify potentially exposed students or staff so they can receive appropriate public health guidance. Notification may be on an individual, group or school basis, see Table 2. When the COVID-19 Community Level indicates an increase, particularly if the level is high or the school is experiencing a cluster, schools may choose to increase communication regarding COVID-19 cases and exposures with their school's community.