The Learning Network for School and District Leaders on Covid-19 Testing

Key Takeaways on Testing in the Context of Vaccine Uptake
Week 2
Nov 9 & 10, 2021

Schools, districts, and states around the country emphasized that regular testing supports the health and safety of their community - even as vaccine coverage has increased. Testing programs continue in the context of increased vaccine uptake and help to support more in-person learning and extracurricular opportunities.

Best Practices for Testing in the Context of Vaccine Uptake

“The summary that I pretty much heard from everyone was that vaccination, whether we’re mandating it or encouraging it strongly, isn’t necessarily impacting our testing programs. We still really see a need for our testing programs to stay.”
-District Testing Coordinator

- Integrate state immunization records with student electronic health records
- Use one consent process: “Just having one single consenting process, for one year...not having to consent multiple times, is most useful…”
- Implement test to play (or test to participate): requires regular testing for students participating in sports or other extracurricular activities (or even field trips) regardless of vaccination status given increased exposure, although not recommended by CDC guidance.
- Implement test to stay: requires frequent testing of unvaccinated students, teachers, and staff who are identified as close contacts - as long as they remain asymptomatic and continue to test negative, they do not need to quarantine, although not recommended by CDC guidance.
- Conduct routine screening for unvaccinated staff: requires staff who are not vaccinated to test regularly. In Tulsa, OK, this approach has been “critical” to prevent spread.
- Provide access to on-site, rapid tests for symptomatic staff and students.
Finding the right cadence and target participation rate for regular testing may vary based on vaccination rates and the strength of other layers of protection (e.g., ventilation systems, mask wearing, social distancing).

“What do we do in a world where vaccines are not perfect and not everyone is vaccinated? We layer on protection, and those layers, of course, include, masking, ventilation, distancing, screening tests, the same things we’ve been doing all along, with vaccinations being another layer. And it’s really important to think about each of these layers working together, so we have a more resilient whole.” – Dr. Christina Silcox

While not recommended in CDC guidance, if resources permit, schools can include vaccinated staff and students (or some subset) along with others in routine pooled screening testing to prevent in-school transmission.

Ah-ha’s!

- When students, parents and staff see how being vaccinated can increase in-person school days, it can motivate more students to get vaccinated.
- There are multiple ways of gathering student vaccination status: for larger systems, integrating school-based data systems with the state immunization registry may be the most streamlined approach; smaller schools may just be able to ask families directly.
  - “We have an electronic health record that integrates with the state immunization registry...even beyond Covid, we know that students are very behind in vaccination rates.” - Manager, District Health. This district, of over 90,000 students, worked out a data sharing agreement with the state immunization registry to have a regular transfer of data from the registry to student's electronic health records. This way, everyone on the district side sees which vaccinations the student needs and can help make these vaccines available.
- Providing onsite testing and vaccination clinics can increase uptake of, and trust in the benefit of, both vaccination and testing.
- Using text messaging to communicate information to staff, families and students, such as when quarantine starts and ends, and vaccine registration information can be helpful for family record keeping, AND can be cost-effective for schools.
- Creating testing consent forms that families sign once to allow for ongoing testing and ensuring it is as inclusive as possible to allow for changes in the testing model can increase opt-in rates. Providing both digital and hard copy versions of testing consent can also increase opt-in rates and equitable access to testing.
  - “When we worked on a consent form in D.C., we worked really hard to acknowledge that the program may shift during the school year, and let’s write a consent form that can account for that, that passes the legal muster for general counsel, but also is broad enough so that families can consent once and not have to be chased around with another form, if we pivot in some way with our testing program.” - School health advisor on Covid-19 response
Ongoing challenges that we aim to address in future learning sessions:

- Managing the evolving pandemic and the changing health and school guidance that accounts for those changes.
- Addressing staff or family resistance to compliance with vaccination/testing mandates.
- Ensuring equitable access to vaccines.

Resources shared during the session:


7. A case study of a county entering a data sharing agreement to track vaccination status: https://chiefsforchange.org/2021/05/13/new-case-study-explains-how-hamilton-county-schools-is-tracking-covid-vaccinations-for-teachers-and-staff/