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**COVID-19 School Communication Guide: CMDHD/MMDHD/DHD#10**

Adapted from https://www.cassiaschools.org/cms/lib/ID01906472/Centricity/Domain/4/SCHOOL%20COMMUNICATION%20GUIDE.pdf and Oregon Department of Education 2021-2022 Communication Toolkit https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Pages/2020-21-Communications-Toolkit.aspx

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The following communication plan is a guide for schools to use when communicating various activities and responses related to COVID-19. This is not all inclusive but gives a range of scenarios and templates to use through various response efforts for students, staff, and families.

General recommendations: Communication about cases should maintain confidentiality in accordance with the ADA, HIPAA, and FERPA and should include messages to counter potential stigma and discrimination.

 See pg. 10 for 10 Tips for COVID-19 Communications.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Contact your local public health department |  |
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|  |
| Be prepared to share information re: close contacts/investigation with local public health **(see pg. 3&4)** |  |
|  |

School is notified of positive COVID-19

Follow local public health guidance for course of action; communicate to students, families, and staff

# Roles and Responsibilities

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Local Public Health Department** | **School** |
| Contact investigation of positive case and contact tracing | Identify close contacts to case in the school and at school related activities **(see pg. 3)** - Roster of potential close contacts with names of student(s), date of birth, address, and phone number  |
| Contact notification and instruction | Ask students, families, and staff to answer phone calls from the health department and follow instructionsgiven by local public health |
| Recommend initial and additional courses of action | Follow and communicate recommendations |
| Provide guidance to positive cases or close contacts indicating when they can safely return to school | Do not allow individuals back to school before the completion of recommended quarantine (for close contacts) or isolation (for cases)  |
| Answer health-related questions | Answer school-related questions |

# Potential Courses of Action Based on Scenario\*

\*examples only, not intended to be inclusive

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Scenario:** | **Objective of Communication** | **Templates**  |
| First exposure in the school regardless of risk level | 1. Notify all students and families in the building of confirmed case.
	1. Reassure that local public health is collaborating with the school to identify any students or staff that were in close contact; those identified will be contacted within 1-2 days by local public health.
2. Update case count on your website per the October 6, 2020 epidemic order, [Reporting of Confirmed and Probable Cases of COVID-19 at Schools](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0%2C9753%2C7-406-98178_98455-541860--%2C00.html).
3. Provide instructions on learning from home to students going into quarantine and isolation.
4. Be prepared for media inquiries (can collaborate with local public health on messaging\*).
 |  Letter/Email for Positive Case (pg. 7) Letter for Close Contacts in  Quarantine (pgs. 9 and 10)Phone Call Text (pg. 8)Media Talking Points (pg. 12) |
| Ongoing exposure/outbreak – close contacts not identifiable and risk of spread is unknown or high: need to suspend in-person education | 1. Notify all students and families in the building of confirmed case.
	1. Reassure that local public health is collaborating with the school to identify any students or staff that were in close contact; those identified will be contacted within 1-2 days by local public health.
2. Update case count on your website per the October 6, 2020 epidemic order, [Reporting of Confirmed and Probable Cases of COVID-19 at Schools](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0%2C9753%2C7-406-98178_98455-541860--%2C00.html)
3. Provide instructions on remote learning to students going into quarantine and isolation.
4. Be prepared for media inquiries (can collaborate with local public health on messaging\*).
 |  Letter/Email for Positive Case (pg. 7) Letter for Close Contacts in  Quarantine (pgs. 9 and 10)Phone Call Text (pg. 8)Media Talking Points (pg. 12) |
| \*Note: for public communications at the health departments, contact:For DHD#10: Jeannine Taylor, jtaylor@dhd10.org, 231-876-3823 For MMDHD: Leslie Kinnee, lkinnee@mmdhd.org, 989-831-3669For CMDHD: Melissa DeRoche, mderoche@cmdhd.org, Office: 989-773-5921x1433, Cell: 989-506-0285  |

**Contact Tracing**

Contact Tracing is a public health tool that is used to help stop the spread of certain communicable diseases. Quarantine separates people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. This is important because people who are infected with COVID-19 are contagious two days before they have any symptoms of being sick, and some never develop symptoms, so unless they are kept separated from other people, they will spread the illness without even knowing it.

This form is to assist you in identifying close contacts within the school. Please return the information to the local health department as soon as possible. Or use other documentation forms provided to you by your health department.

|  |
| --- |
| **Staff or student has a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test.** |
| **For symptomatic cases****Date Symptoms Started: \_\_\_\_ /\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_****48 hours prior to this: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_** | **For asymptomatic positive tests****Test Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_****48 hours prior to test date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_** |
| **Dates staff or student attended school starting from 48 hours from onset of symptoms (or test date)****\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_** |
| **Close Contacts\* to case on those dates:** |
| **Date of Last Contact** | **Contact Name** | **Date of Birth** | **Address of Primary Guardian** | **Phone Number of Primary Guardian** |
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\* A close contact is defined here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html>

**Letter to Students and Families: What to Expect - Health & Safety in our School(s) for the 2021-22 School Year**

*Use this letter and fact sheet to help build awareness and understanding about the health and safety protocols your school(s) will put in place for the upcoming school year. Let students, parents and families know how they can support these efforts and where to go for more information.*

Dear Students & Families,

We are excited to welcome students and staff back to school this fall and want to share some updates about what to expect.

**School Days & Instructional Time**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School District will operate \_\_\_\_\_ days each week, serving all students full-time, in-person this fall. Our district will provide remote learning for students who may need to quarantine. [Insert local details].

**Health & Safety in Our Schools**

As our schools plan for the fall 2021 in-person school year, it is important to remember our communities will be living with the virus until there is widespread immunity. COVID-19 continues to change with new variants, our knowledge of mitigation efforts grows over time.

Right now, the best tools to protect ourselves and one another are vaccination for those eligible, physical distancing, face coverings, ventilation and airflow, hand hygiene, and staying home if you feel sick or you know you’ve been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

The Michigan Department of Education shared guidance this summer that empowers school district leaders - in partnership with local public health - to make decisions about how to implement health and safety protocols, including physical distancing and face coverings.

We want to share the health and safety protocols we will have in place in our schools, along with steps we plan to take in response to COVID-19 cases and outbreaks, should they occur in our school(s) during the 2021-22 school year.

We encourage you to review the information below and talk with your student(s) about what to expect. The transition back to school may prompt a range of emotions for you and/or your child - from anxiety and uncertainty to excitement and opportunity. We want you to know it is a priority to create safe spaces where your child feels safe, cared for, and connected to the learning environment. Working together, we can harness this opportunity to rekindle joy and learning in the classrooms, auditoriums, and playgrounds.

You can find more information on our webpage at [Insert local details].

The best person to contact should you have questions is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**What to Expect Fact Sheet**

**Health & Safety Protocols**

The majority of health and safety protocols are *recommendations* for the 2021-22 school year. This means school districts and public charter schools will have the option to implement what they feel is best and safest for their buildings.

It is still required that the schools notify the health department of cases of COVID-19 in the schools, assist the health department with contact tracing, and post the number of school associated cases on our website.

**Vaccination**: Our schools bring together people who are fully vaccinated and people who are not fully vaccinated. Everyone age 12 and older is eligible for a vaccine. Vaccination of 12-17 year olds requires parental or guardian consent. Vaccination of students and staff is [insert local details (ie. not required / optional / encouraged)] and not required to come to school. Vaccination supports a student’s access to in-person learning, sports and extracurricular activities. Fully vaccinated individuals who are exposed to COVID-19 are not required to quarantine unless they develop symptoms which ensures continuity of in-person instruction. When as many eligible students and staff are vaccinated as possible, our school is better able to serve students and families without interruption.

**Face Coverings**: Face coverings are [insert local details (ie. required / optional / encouraged)]for students and staff both indoors and outdoors during school hours. [Insert local details] **Face coverings are required on public transit, including school buses, for passengers and drivers until lifted by the federal government.** The CDC order for mandatory use of face coverings on public transit cannot be waived by state or local authorities. The [CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/masks/mask-travel-guidance.html) is available on the CDC website.

**Physical Distancing:** We will support physical distancing in all daily activities and instruction, maintaining at least 3 feet between students to the extent possible. Our schools will have signs and visuals to remind students, staff and visitors.

* Classrooms [Insert local details]
* Hallways [Insert local details]
* Entrances [Insert local details]
* Transitions [Insert local details]
* Lunch [Insert local details]

**Cohorting**: [Insert local details]

**Ventilation and Airflow:** [Insert local details]

**Handwashing:** Hand washing will be taught and encouraged. Students and staff will have access to soap and water and hand sanitizer. [Insert local details]

**Responding to COVID-19 Cases or Outbreaks**

We want you to know it is a priority for our school district to create a learning environment where your child feels safe, cared for, and connected to peers and school staff.

**When staff and students show symptoms of being ill:** if the student or staff member feels ill prior to coming to school, they should stay home. If a student or staff member becomes ill at school, we will have a designated location to separate people who have symptoms of COVID-19 from people who are not sick. [Insert local details]

**When a staff member or a student tests positive for COVID-19**: our school district will work with our local public health authority to take next steps. This will include communicating to our school community and contacting those who may have been exposed. [Insert local details]

CDC guidance states that people who are [fully vaccinated](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/keythingstoknow.html#:~:text=People%20are%20considered%20fully%20vaccinated,COVID%2D19%20vaccine.) and do not have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine or get tested after an exposure to someone with COVID-19.

# Letter for Positive Case in School

XXXXX XX, 20XX

Dear Parent/Guardian,

A student or staff member that attends the [SCHOOL] with your child has been diagnosed with COVID-19. We are working closely with [local health department] to respond to this news, protect the health of our community and maintain education opportunities for the affected individuals. You will be contacted directly with further instructions on quarantine if your child is found to be a close contact.

Each situation calls for different protocols. In this case, we will follow the following steps:

1. (customize steps)

2. [Examples: explaining cohort impacts, addressing contact tracing, any relevant information on quarantine or isolation, staying home or testing, a deep clean of classrooms and common areas in the school, manual wiping of surfaces, use of an electrostatic disinfectant sprayer that deploys charged disinfectant particles into an area that covers every surface in the space.]

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is through vaccinations for those who are eligible, wearing face coverings, physical distancing and to practice good health hygiene habits.

Be sure to wash your hands frequently with soap and water, cover your coughs and sneezes, and avoid contact with people who have signs of illness. Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat healthy food.

Wearing cloth face coverings reduces the spread of viruses and helps prevent those who have the virus, but do not have symptoms, from passing it to others. [Insert local details] .

We will keep you updated with any new information as it comes out, while meeting the requirements to honor everyone's right to privacy.

More information can also be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov>.

Sincerely,

**Phone Call (Pre-Recorded Message)**

This is Superintendent (name) from (name) school district.

Recently, we were notified that a school district employee / student has tested positive for COVID-19. If you have not been notified that your child was in direct contact with an exposed person and needs to quarantine, they can return to school.

As members of the school community, we understand that this might raise concerns and questions about how this impacts your child and family.

We are working closely with [INSERT local health department] to respond to this news and protect the health of our community.

We have taken immediate action:

* [Insert local details]

As a reminder: CDC guidance states that people who are fully vaccinated and do not have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine after an exposure to someone with COVID-19. This protects the student’s access to in-person learning, sports and extracurricular activities. People are considered fully vaccinated 2 weeks after their second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, or 2 weeks after the single-dose Johnson & Johnson’s COVID-19 vaccine.

We care about the health and safety of our community.

For more information, visit the homepage of our website at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Notification: Exposure to COVID-19/Need to Quarantine OPTION 1**

Dear Parent/Guardian (or staff),

It has been determined that your child (you) may have had direct exposure to a person with COVID-19.

In cooperation with [Health Department], we are requesting your child (you) quarantine (stay home) for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ days. [Insert local details] Your child (you) will remain at home for the duration and access learning remotely (work remotely), with a tentative plan to return to in-person learning (work) on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[Insert date] .

Quarantine is not necessary when the exposed individual is fully vaccinated or has been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 3 months. If you have proof of COVID-19 vaccination or proof of past COVID-19 infection, please present that to (Name of COVID-19 liaison) at the school.

Please notify [Insert contact information] if your child (you) or any additional household members become ill with COVID-19. Our school will work with the local public health authority to communicate next steps to ensure a safe return to school.

We know this is a hard time for everyone and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We will remain in contact with you to update the status of the school(s). Please check our school district webpage for updated information.

If you have questions, please contact \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

**Notification: Exposure to COVID-19/Need to Quarantine OPTION 2**

Dear Parent/Guardian (or staff),

You/ your child have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. You or your child last had contact on [insert date or dates].

[Programs to choose the quarantine option being implemented and remove those not being used]

[Option 1 (14 days)] As a close contact, the safest option is to stay home and not take part in any activities/sports for 14 days, which is [insert end date of quarantine]. You or your child can return on [insert date] as long as they do not develop symptoms or test positive during this time. Testing is recommended at least five days after the last time you or your child was close to the person with COVID-19. Others living in the home can continue to go to child care, school, youth program, camp and other community activities.

[Option 2 (10 days)] As a close contact, you or your child should stay home and not take part in any activities/sports for 10 days, which is [insert end date of quarantine]. You or your child can return on [insert date] as long as they do not develop symptoms or test positive during this time. Testing is recommended at least five days after the last time you or your child was close to the person with COVID-19. Others living in the home can continue to go to child care, school, youth program, camp and other community activities.

[Option 3] If you/your child have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 90 days or are fully vaccinated (you are at least 14 days after the vaccination series was fully completed) you/your child do not need to quarantine if you/your child do not currently have any symptoms of COVID-19. Others living in the home can continue to go to child care, school, youth program, camp and other community activities.

Closely monitor you/your child for symptoms. If you/your child have any symptoms of COVID-19, isolate from others , get tested, and others living in the home should not attend child care, school, youth program, camp or other activities and. Symptoms include:

* Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher
* New cough or a cough that gets worse
* Difficulty/hard time breathing
* New loss of taste or smell
* Sore throat
* Nasal congestion/stuffy or runny nose
* Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
* Muscle pain
* Extreme fatigue/feeling very tired
* Severe/very bad headache
* Chills

If you/your child tests positive for COVID-19 during quarantine, contact your school or program for next steps.

We are sorry for the problems this may cause you or your family. To stop outbreaks and protect participants and staff we need to do everything we can to stop the spread of COVID-19.

If you have questions, contact [insert school/child care/youth program contact and contact information].

Thank you for supporting our program.

Sincerely,

**Letter for Short-Term Dismissal**

XXXXX XX, 20XX

Dear Parents/Guardians:

[HEALTH DEPARTMENT] has been working with us and has identified an outbreak of COVID-19 illnesses at our school and are recommending a short-term dismissal of students and most staff. At this time, we are closing the school/transitioning to remote education until \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_to allow for [recommendations (e.g. staff and students to stay home and monitor symptoms for 14 days)]. **We understand how hard it is for families to make alternate arrangements on short notice and we appreciate your help in stopping the spread of the disease through this quick action.**

We are working closely with [INSERT local health department] to respond to this outbreak and protect the health of our community. You will be contacted directly with further instructions on quarantine if your child is a close contact.

Each situation calls for different protocols. In this case, we will follow the following steps:

1. (customize steps)

2. [Examples: explaining cohort impacts, addressing contact tracing, any relevant information on quarantine or isolation, staying home or testing, a deep clean of classrooms and common areas in the school, manual wiping of surfaces, use of an electrostatic disinfectant sprayer that deploys charged disinfectant particles into an area that covers every surface in the space.]

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is through vaccinations for those who are eligible, wearing face coverings, physical distancing and to practice good health hygiene habits.

Be sure to wash your hands frequently with soap and water, cover your coughs and sneezes, and avoid contact with people who have signs of illness. Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat healthy food.

Wearing cloth face coverings reduces the spread of viruses and helps prevent those who have the virus, but do not have symptoms, from passing it to others. [Insert local details] .

We will keep you updated with any new information as it comes out, while meeting the requirements to honor everyone's right to privacy.

More information can also be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov>.

Sincerely,

**Media Talking Points for COVID-19 Events: For School Leaders to Customize**

#### About the COVID-19 Scenario

* On X date, at X school located in X county, X number of individuals were confirmed positive for the COVID-19 virus.
* The individual(s) involved have been asked to stay home and self-isolate, as have any of those who were in close contact.
* The safety and well-being of our staff and students is our top priority.
* We have contacted the local health department and are working cooperatively and collaboratively with any additional direction given by them.

#### As a School District, we have initiated a Response Plan:

* We have notified staff, students and families of the event.
* We are undertaking additional cleaning and sanitation protocols throughout the school (or “affected places in” the school).
* We also continue to follow and maintain MDHHS and Michigan Department of Education guidelines; namely practicing handwashing, physical distancing to the degree we can, requiring people wear masks inside the building, and upholding cleaning and sanitizing protocols.

#### (Optional - When the school building closes temporarily, or students are asked to quarantine after being exposed or testing positive for COVID-19)

* While our school buildings have had to close for on-site instruction, learning has continued because of our dedicated teachers and school leaders.
* Throughout this crisis, we have come to recognize the importance of face-to-face interaction and look forward to students and teachers returning to school buildings as soon as it is safe for all students and teachers.
* Our goal is for students and staff to be able to return once it is safe to do so.
* Students will continue learning at home, online, and in their communities for (e.g. the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year)
* The school is working to address questions and decisions necessary to reopen school buildings safely, and we will engage parents, teachers, school leaders and policymakers throughout this process.
* We are working with our district and school leaders to make accommodations for vulnerable people.

**Talking Points / Script for Teachers and Staff - Positive Case at School**

A positive case of COVID-19 was reported today [Insert date] .

This is difficult news and impacts all who are part of the (school / district) community.

While we are not able to share personally-identifiable information, we care about keeping our community informed.

Here’s what we know about the COVID-19 case(s) reported:

* On [date], an employee / student at [District / School Name] notified us of their positive test result for COVID-19.
* It has been \_\_\_ days since the employee / student was last in contact with staff or students in our district.
* The individual(s) involved have been asked to stay home and self-isolate, as have any of those who were in close contact.

The safety and well-being of our staff and students is our top priority.

Our district has taken these action steps:

[Insert local details]

● They’ve contacted, and are working closely with, the Local Public Health Authority

● They’ve contacted all person(s) who were in close contact with the individual.

● They’ve launched deep cleaning efforts.

● They’ve notified all students and families.

**Tip Sheet: Communicating about the 2021-22 School Year**

From Oregon Department of Education 2021-2022 Communication Toolkit <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Pages/2020-21-Communications-Toolkit.aspx>

*Tips to consider when preparing for the 2021 – 2022 academic year:*

**Establish a communications strategy. Consider these methods:**

* Administer a survey to educators, parents, and/or students to gather their views around reopening and the role of summer learning as part of the equation.
* Appoint a family liaison in charge of overseeing all communications with families, if one is not present already.
* Ensure a dedicated COVID-19 email address and/or telephone number (run by the district) is functional, messages are monitored, and timely responses are provided.
* Host virtual town halls.
* Publish a press release articulating a detailed vision for the 2021-22 school year and how community input was/will be incorporated.
* Create and run public service announcements encouraging steps such as filling out the survey.
* Publish opinion pieces that articulate the district’s reasoning behind its reopening plans and describe health and safety precautions being taken.
* Conduct a media briefing to communicate the district’s reopening plans.

**Provide concrete, family-friendly information**

* Avoid ‘education jargon’ or difficult instructions that are not plain language and can confuse parents. Explain what the changes will mean and provide step by step instructions for what they can expect when an outbreak occurs. For example, if they will receive an alert message through the school’s messenger service.
* Translate updates into school community native languages as needed.
* Be empathetic and personalize the tone of updates as much as possible (parents care first and foremost on how changes will affect their child rather than the system). COVID-19 and school closures are stressful for parents, teachers, and students. Communication should acknowledge this difficult time and offer opportunities for the school community to support each other as much as possible.

**Engage partners and key stakeholders**

* Co-host meetings with educator organizations, community groups, parents and families, and other civic-minded bodies to hear concerns and provide clarity on the district’s vision.
* Record meetings and post to website.
* Discuss and review parent-friendly materials.
* Work with partners to identify additional stakeholders and opportunities for deeper engagement.

**Communicate new information frequently using multiple channels and platforms**

* Update your website (homepage) regularly with concrete, easy to understand information and resources. In addition to the updates, consider posting items that are being worked on and let parents know when to check back. (Example: Fall School Plans: In Progress. Check back for updates soon).
* Include all links to district digital learning platforms in one place as well as additional mobile-friendly digital resources for families who may not have access to high-speed internet.
* If possible, also include the latest information regarding COVID-19 assistance (i.e. how students can get free meals if they qualify, or technology or internet connectivity assistance if available.)
* Have materials reviewed by civil rights, advocacy groups, and organizations that represent vulnerable communities for tone, cultural competency, and to ensure key issues are addressed and that the communication resources are reaching underserved populations.
* Take steps to ensure that all materials are available in multiple languages and are accessible to parents and other stakeholders with disabilities.
* Communicate via local media (earned, donated, and paid) channels including print, TV, and radio.
* Track questions that are raised and post an FAQ online with clear, detailed answers to respond to common concerns and issues.
* Engage with stakeholders on various social media channels.
* Utilize social media, voice and text to reach parents with key information.
* In addition to the above channels, share information through community-based organizations such as PTAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, and places of worship.

**Send regular updates on a consistent schedule so parents know to expect them. (For example, every Monday night.)**

* Use multiple communication methods in a coordinated way to ensure you’re reaching all families, including those without email/internet access. For example, share updates by text, phone, and social media.
* If updates are too long for text/social media, link to the website page and/or one pager that can easily be opened from those platforms.
* Consider leveraging an existing auto phone call system or chain (or create one) to contact families and/or students that you haven’t been able to reach online. Phone calls should also be used for communicating sensitive or personal information.
* If possible, provide printed updates and instructions for home learning.

**Create Opportunities for Two-way Communication**

* Consider a way for parents to submit questions, ideas, and share resources.
* Provide a question/contact us box either on the website or Facebook page.
* Based on what parents are asking, post FAQ’s on the website.
* Use social media and/or PTA/parent group pages as an avenue for parents to share ideas and resources on both academic as well as social/emotional development.