



UPDATED MASK GUIDANCE

February 18, 2022

NEW GUIDANCE FROM DHHS/DPI

DHHS/DPI held a joint call on February 10, 2022, to release the latest revision to the NCStrongSchools Toolkit. The new guidance will go into effect on Monday, February 21, 2022.

MAJOR CHANGE

Individual contact tracing and exclusion from school of asymptomatic people after an identified exposure is no longer recommended statewide in K-12 schools.

The reason for this change can be found on page 15 of the NCStrongSchools Toolkit and has been added below:

While contact tracing has been an important tool for slowing the spread of COVID at earlier points in the pandemic and remains important in certain high-risk congregate settings, individual contact tracing is a less effective tool for responding to the pandemic at this phase in other settings due to several factors that include:

- *Emergence of variants with shorter incubation periods and more rapid transmission*
- *Most contagious periods prior to symptom onset and during the first few days of illness*
- *Large number of asymptomatic and less severe cases*
- *Many infections are never identified by public health agencies because persons with asymptomatic or mild cases may not get tested as well as the increasing use of over the counter at-home tests*
- *Low proportion of all infections being detected or reported to public health during time when people are in their most infectious time period*

SCENARIOS FOR EXCLUSION

There are several scenarios that still require brief exclusion from school AND still require the individual to wear a mask for a brief period of time (even in a mask optional environment) upon return to school.

- **Diagnosis with no symptoms**
 - Can return to school 5 days, after specimen collection, as long as they do not develop symptoms
 - MUST wear mask an additional 5 days on all PCS campuses
- **Presence of symptoms (and positive or chooses not to test)**
 - Can return to school 5 days after first day of symptoms, AND 24 hours fever free, AND symptoms improving
 - MUST wear mask an additional 5 days on all PCS campuses
- **Presence of symptoms (and negative test or alternative diagnosis)**
 - Can return to school after feeling better for at least 24 hours AND fever free

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- PCS is still offering students and staff the option to participate in the Mako testing program in order to stay in school/get results more efficiently
- Individuals who have symptoms should stay home and seek testing
- Individuals who have symptoms should isolate and wear a mask while waiting
- Masks are still required on buses by Federal Law