

# Interim Guidance on Management of COVID-19 Cases in PreK-12 Schools

The following guidance refers to management of COVID-19 cases in schools within the City of Chicago.

## Key Points (updated March 25, 2021)

- CDC has released [new interim quarantine guidance for vaccinated persons](#):
  - Individuals who are fully vaccinated (i.e., are  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of the second dose in a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series or  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of 1 dose of a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine) are not required to quarantine if identified as a close contact. The “COVID Testing Guide” figure on page 5 has been updated to align.
  - As applies to [Chicago’s Emergency Travel Order](#), vaccinated persons (returning travelers who live or work in Chicago, or visitors to Chicago) who have travelled domestically are not required to quarantine if they are: asymptomatic; and
    - Fully vaccinated (i.e., are  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of the second dose in a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series or  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of 1 dose of a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine).
    - It is recommended that you bring a copy of your COVID-19 vaccination records while traveling.
- **CDC and CDPH [continue to endorse quarantine for 14 days](#)** for close contacts of COVID-19 cases in schools broadly given high rates of asymptomatic transmission among children and variable student/staff screening programs across the city.
  - Individuals who have had lab-confirmed COVID-19 in the past 90 days or those fully vaccinated (and 14 days out from the last dose) are not required to quarantine if identified as a close contact.
  - As of March 17, quarantine guidance on seropositive individuals has changed (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antibody-tests-guidelines.html>). Unvaccinated persons who have tested antibody positive within 3 months before or immediately following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and who have remained asymptomatic since the current COVID-19 exposure do not need to quarantine, provided there is limited or no contact with persons at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness, including older adults and persons with certain medical conditions and the individuals monitor themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 during the 14 days after exposure.
  - Based on CDC’s December 2, 2020 [updated quarantine options](#), CDPH will allow shortened quarantine periods of 10 days if all of the following are true:
    - The school is maintaining 6-foot distancing in the classroom.
    - A negative RT-PCR (antigen not acceptable) is obtained between days 7-9 and documentation is provided to the school.
    - If 6-foot distancing and masking are ensured at all times upon return.
    - Note: this option is not allowed for sports return.

- A 7-day quarantine (with testing) option was offered by CDC but schools should recognize that this comes with a residual risk of transmission and CDPH does not currently recommend this option.
- Though classroom physical distancing recommendations recently changed (see Interim Guidance on COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies in PreK-12 Schools 3/25/21 and [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention | CDC](#)), the definition of close contact remains within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more cumulatively over a 24-hour period.
- The COVID-19 viral testing landscape for is evolving rapidly. CDC recently released new guidance around [follow-up testing for antigen results](#) described below. Clinicians should choose an appropriate test based on their clinical suspicion of COVID-19. See CDPH COVID-19 PreK-12 Testing Guide on page 7 for additional details.
- School administrators should refer to CDPH's Interim Guidance on COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies in PK-12 Schools 3/25/21 and [CDC's School Considerations: Readiness and Action Planning Tool](#) to protect students, staff and communities
- Messaging to families and staff around safe COVID-19 practices and community mitigation practices outside of school to protect school cohorts and education as an essential service are critical for your school community. This includes reinforcing safe travel recommendations for unvaccinated individuals and students.

## COVID-19 Reporting to CDPH

Under [Public Health Order No. 2020-2](#), schools must report to CDPH clusters of 2 or more cases of COVID-19 occurring within 14 calendar days of each other within 24 hours of identifying the cluster, in order to prevent COVID-19 transmission in schools and ensure efficient case investigation and contact tracing. **Five or more cases is considered an outbreak according to Illinois Department of Public Health.**

Clear guidance should be provided to parents and staff about acceptable methods of reporting COVID-19 lab results or diagnosis to the school as soon as possible. Schools should reinforce that children and staff be kept out of school pending the results of COVID-19 testing for any reason.

Cases in a student or staff member should be reported through the confidential CDPH COVID-19 Online Case Report Form: <http://redcap.link/chicovidreport> (select option 2 "Community congregate setting: single case or cluster of 2 or more cases").

In order to complete the form, you will need the following information:

- Total number of classrooms/cohorts impacted
- Total number of students thought to be exposed (close contacts)
- Total number of staff thought to be exposed (close contacts)
- The positive individual's reported or observed symptom onset date
- The positive individual's last date at school
- Additional optional information includes method of notification, test date (if known), testing provider (if known).

Multiple cases may be identified among members who attend the same school, but this will not always constitute a school outbreak, or indicate transmission within the school setting. For example, cases that occur in different time frames (at least 15 calendar days apart), in separate locations, and/or having no common source of exposure would not constitute an outbreak.

If your school has 2 or more cases (apart from household members) that involve 2 or more different cohorts or classrooms, make a note in your [REDCap online case report form](#) to receive additional CDPH support and guidance. This may prompt more intensive case investigation. Select cohort quarantine rather than full school closure is typically preferred. Case investigation and contact tracing occurs seven days per week.

## School Contact Tracing

Given your access to staff and student records, the need for prompt notification to close contacts, and the relationship you have with your staff and families, your school is best positioned to conduct initial contact tracing (identification of contacts) and notification. CDPH will conduct contact tracing of cases outside of the school.

### Contact Tracing First Steps

- Above all, ensure the identity of the positive individual is protected.
- Interview the staff member or student's parent/guardian by telephone as soon as you receive a verbal or written report that they tested positive. Questions to ask include:
  - Were they diagnosed through a test?
    - If so, what type (nose swab, mouth/oral swab, or blood test).
      - If they had only an antibody (blood test) and they have not had any symptoms, no further action is required.
    - What was the test date?
  - What was the last day they were at school? (Please confirm by looking at attendance files.)
    - If symptoms, please ask the first day of their symptoms.
    - If NO symptoms, confirm the test date again.
- Complete the CDPH Online COVID-19 Case Report Form: <http://redcap.link/chicovidreport> (select option 2 "Community congregate setting: single case or cluster of 2 or more cases").

### Determining Who Is a Close Contact

- By definition, close contacts are individuals with whom the positive case was within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more cumulatively over a 24-hour period, **starting 2 days prior to their first day of symptoms (or for asymptomatic individuals, 2 days prior to their test date) through their last day at school (or ten days after their onset of symptoms/test date)**.
- Depending on the classroom structure selected by the individual school, all students and staff within the positive individual's classroom/cohort could be considered close contacts but is not required during periods of low community transmission.
  - Make sure to include any extracurricular activity groups (e.g., sports, music, before- and after-school programs) and shared transportation.
  - In general, CDPH supports a broad definition of cohorts and broad quarantine of cohorts to facilitate timely quarantine and reduce transmission.
  - **In order to protect school operations, rotation of teachers among cohorts should be limited and/or activities of the teacher with the cohort should be limited to reduce number of exposed students should a teacher become infected.**
- Assess whether there were any other staff members not assigned to the classroom/cohort or students in other classrooms/cohorts with whom the positive individual had close contact (e.g., siblings or substitute teachers). If the positive individual is a staff member, this assessment should include an interview of that staff member.

- Once your [CDPH Online COVID-19 Case Report Form](#) is received by CDPH, you will receive an email with instructions on submitting the close contact list.
  - This list should include the following information:
    - Student\_Staff Name
    - Date of Birth
    - Parent\_Guardian Name
    - Address
    - All contact numbers on file
    - Email address

## Isolation/Quarantine Recommendations

### Definitions:

- **Isolation** is used to separate people infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, from people who are not infected. These individuals can have symptoms or no symptoms (asymptomatic). People who are in isolation should stay home until it's safe for them to be around others. In the home, anyone sick or infected should separate themselves from others by staying in a specific "sick room" or area and using a separate bathroom (if available).
- **Quarantine** is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others and monitor their health.
- **Symptoms:** People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of reported symptoms – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms can include:
  - Fever (100.4°F or higher) or chills
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Fatigue from unknown cause
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headache
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Sore throat
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - This list does not include all possible symptoms and children and youth with SARS-CoV-2 infection may experience any, all, or none of these symptoms.

### For student or staff with a positive test:

- Ensure the positive individual is aware that they should isolate, meaning stay home and away from others until it has been at least 10 days since their symptoms first appeared (or for asymptomatic individuals, from their test date) and at least 24 hours with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improved symptoms, whichever is longer.

### For student or staff with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19:

- CDPH strongly recommends testing for all staff and students with new onset of symptoms not attributed to allergies or a pre-existing condition including fever (100.4°F or higher), new onset of

moderate to severe headache, shortness of breath, new cough, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, new loss of sense of taste or smell, fatigue from unknown cause, muscle or body aches from unknown cause. (See <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IDPH-COVID19-Exclusion-Decison-Tree.pdf>).

- If a student or staff member has symptoms of COVID-19, they should be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and isolated while awaiting the test result. See Chicago testing guide on page 6 and CDC's [COVID-19 SCHOOL SYMPTOM SCREENING FLOWCHART \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s110520-covid-19-screening.html).
  - **If appropriate pre-test probability exists, as determined by the healthcare provider,** a positive result on any viral test [antigen, rapid antigen, molecular (Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT))] should be considered positive for public health purposes. If ordered in the right clinical context, RT-PCR should always be considered positive.
  - Clinicians should offer testing broadly to children attending any in-person or hybrid learning model if notified that the child was exposed or has any symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
  - Clinicians should choose an appropriate test based on their clinical suspicion of COVID-19 and school administrators should defer to clinical discretion for the type of test chosen and need for repeat testing.
    - Factors to consider include the sensitivity and turnaround time of the test, the clinical presentation, time since symptom onset, risk of exposure to COVID-19, underlying risk factors for severe COVID-19 and the risk of onward transmission.
    - **A low threshold for testing is generally recommended.**
  - If high clinical suspicion exists due to clinical appearance or other risk factors as described above, and an antigen or other rapid test is negative, healthcare providers should obtain a PCR within 2 days of the previous negative test and the individual should continue to isolate while awaiting those results. See figure: "[CDC Antigen Test Algorithm](#)" for testing options related to pre-test probability.
- If a student or staff member tests negative, ensure it has been 24-hours with no fever (without fever-reducing medication) and with improved symptoms before allowing them to return to school.
- If a student or staff member has symptoms of COVID-19, and it is determined by a medical provider that the individual likely does NOT have a COVID-19 infection, the student or staff member still needs to be tested and may only return to school if the following are met:
  - **Documentation of a negative test for COVID-19; AND**
  - **It has been 24-hours with no fever (without fever-reducing medication).**
    - Only if the two above criteria are met would a note from a medical provider documenting an alternate diagnosis be acceptable if the student or staff member continues to be symptomatic for another reason besides COVID-19 infection (e.g., other viral illness).
- If a symptomatic student or staff member does not get tested for COVID-19, CDPH does not recommend relying on a medical provider's note alone without a negative COVID-19 test result to allow a symptomatic student or staff to return to school. COVID-19 cannot be ruled out by symptom history or clinical exam alone. Only the right test done at the right time can rule out COVID-19.
  - School administrators should contact CDPH at [covidschools@chicago.gov](mailto:covidschools@chicago.gov) if they are seeking to isolate a child without a test result.
  - Schools should quarantine household members of a symptomatic student or staff member who also attend the school pending the results of testing.

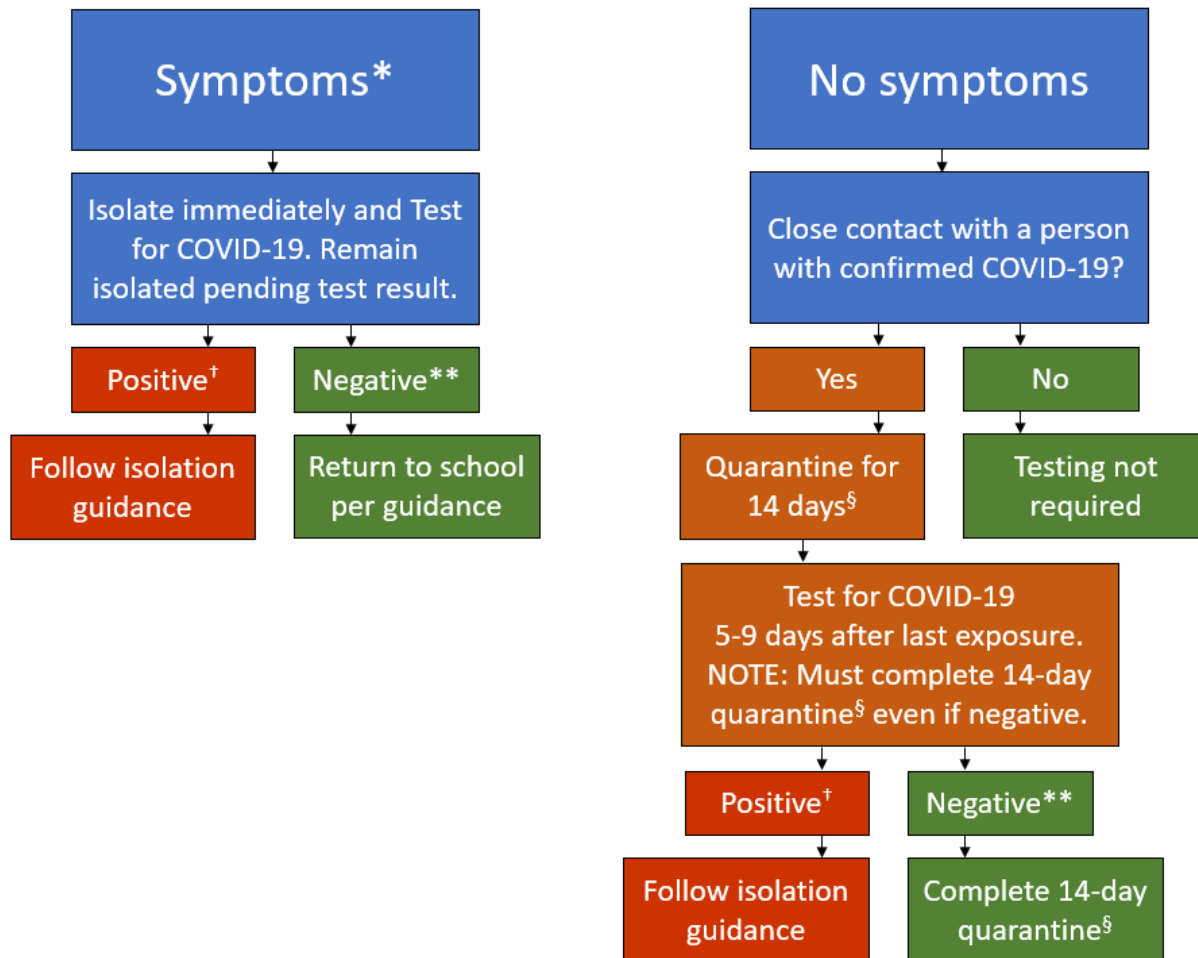
- For additional *Procedures for Students, Teachers, and Support Staff who Become Sick at School*, refer to [IDPH Public Health Interim Guidance for Pre-K-12 Schools and Day Care Programs for Addressing COVID-19](#).

### **For student or staff with an identified close contact exposure:**

- The [CDC continues to endorse](#) that any student or staff with close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 be quarantined, meaning excluded from school, for **14 days from the last day of exposure to a positive case** and monitored for symptoms. If close contacts develop symptoms, they should be evaluated and tested for COVID-19.
  - Schools may consider discontinuation of quarantine after 10 days (from last close contact) if an individual remains asymptomatic and if all of the following are true:
    - The school is maintaining 6-foot distancing in the classroom.
    - A negative RT-PCR (antigen not acceptable) is obtained between days 7-9 and documentation is provided to the school.
    - If 6-foot distancing and masking are ensured at all times upon return.
    - Note: this option is not allowed for sports return.
  - A 7-day quarantine (with testing) option was offered by CDC but schools should recognize that this comes with a residual risk of transmission and CDPH does not currently recommend this option.
- It continues to be recommended that all students or staff with close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 get tested 5-9 days after last exposure.
- Siblings/household members of exposed asymptomatic children do not require quarantine or testing unless they themselves were also exposed.
- Close contacts do not have to quarantine if they are asymptomatic and either:
  - They have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 90 days.
  - They are fully vaccinated, the vaccination series was completed more than 2 weeks ago.
- While masking of staff and students and other precautions are critical to prevent spread of COVID-19 within the school, these factors will not change the recommendation for quarantine of close contacts. Certain mitigation and contact tracing rules may differ depending on local disease incidence as per CDC Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html>



# COVID-19 Testing Guide for Students and Employees of PreK-12 Schools Located in Chicago



\* New onset of symptoms not attributed to allergies or a pre-existing condition including fever (100.4°F or higher), new onset of moderate to severe headache, shortness of breath, new cough, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, new loss of sense of taste or smell, fatigue from unknown cause, muscle or body aches from unknown cause.  
<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IDPH-COVID19-Exclusion-Decison-Tree.pdf>

† A positive result on any single viral test (antigen, rapid molecular or PCR) with appropriate pre-test probability as determined by the clinician should be considered positive for public health purposes. Subsequent negative tests do not change requirements for quarantine and isolation.

\*\* Clinicians should choose an appropriate test based on their clinical suspicion of COVID-19. For example, if high clinical suspicion exists due to clinical appearance or risk factor (e.g. contact with a confirmed case), and an antigen or other rapid test is negative, healthcare providers may consider obtaining a PCR test. See supplemental figure: “[CDC Antigen Test Algorithm](#)” for testing options related to pre-test probability.

§ Schools should ensure that symptom monitoring and testing if symptoms develop continue. Test again only if symptoms develop during the remaining 14-day quarantine period. Individuals who are fully vaccinated (i.e., are ≥2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series or ≥2 weeks following receipt of 1 dose of a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine) are not required to quarantine if identified as a close contact.

## Notifications

- Notify the identified close contacts that they were exposed to someone with COVID-19 at the school. It is recommended that you notify exposed staff and the families of exposed students via a preferred, successful method of communication at your school. A sample close contact notification template is included at the end of this document and downloadable at [www.chicagohan.org/covid-19](http://www.chicagohan.org/covid-19) for those you may be unable to reach by other means or if you choose to send a written notification.
  - Instruct them to quarantine at home for 14 days from the last day of contact with the person who self-reported (do not reveal the identity of the positive case).
  - Close contacts should monitor their symptoms and contact their medical provider if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.
- All staff and students of the school, regardless of whether they are close contacts or not, should be notified of the positive case, while maintaining confidentiality. You may use the general notification letter template at the end of this document and downloadable at [www.chicagohan.org/covid-19](http://www.chicagohan.org/covid-19) as a guide.

## Cleaning

Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after persons suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been at the school. Follow [CDC cleaning and disinfection recommendations \(updated 3/1/21\)](#). **Full school closures are not automatically required for cleaning if appropriate cohorting has occurred. Any decisions about full school closures should be made in consultation with CDPH.** Refer to [IDPH Public Health Interim Guidance for Pre-K-12 Schools and Day Care Programs for Addressing COVID-19](#) for additional instructions on environmental cleaning and disinfection.

## What Schools Can Expect After Reporting a Case

1. After receiving a report, CDPH will contact your school to discuss infection controls in place at your school and ways to protect your staff and students.
2. CDPH will call the positive staff member or family of the student once the positive lab result is received from a healthcare provider and conduct household and community contact tracing outside of your school.
3. You should notify CDPH if additional positive cases are identified in your school by filling out the CDPH COVID-19 confidential [online case report form](#) (select option 2 “Community congregate setting: single case or cluster of 2 or more cases”).
4. Refer to the following resources for further information:
  - a. [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus)
  - b. [CDC Guidance for Schools](#)
  - c. [CDC School Mitigation Toolkit](#)
  - d. [CDC School Walkthrough Guide](#)
  - e. [CDC Strategies for Protecting K-12 School Staff from COVID-19](#)
  - f. [ISBE/IDPH FAQs \(3/16/21\)](#)
  - g. [IDPH Guidance for Child’s Face Covering Medical Tolerance](#)
  - h. [IDPH/ISBE guidelines \(3/15/21\)](#) with exclusion decision tree
  - i. [ISBE Phase 4 Guidance](#)
  - j. [www.chicago.gov/reopening](http://www.chicago.gov/reopening)
  - k. [IDPH Guidance for Pre-K-12 Schools and Day Care Programs for Addressing COVID-19](#)



## Notification Templates (available for download at [www.chicagohan.org/covid-19](http://www.chicagohan.org/covid-19))

### **CLOSE CONTACT COMMUNICATION**

Subject: Exposure to COVID-19 Case at \_(SCHOOL)\_

Dear \_(Individual's Name)\_,

We are writing to update you on a recent development regarding the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). We have learned that a \_(SCHOOL)\_ community member has been diagnosed with COVID-19. You were identified as a close contact of this individual.

You/your child should monitor your health starting now through \_(DATE of 14 days after last exposure to positive case, depending on which quarantine option your school uses)\_. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever (temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

You/your child should not go to work or school and should avoid public places during this time.

**If you/your child develop [symptoms of COVID-19](#)**, please contact your medical provider to discuss evaluation and testing. Any individuals who are sick with or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and away from others for at least 10 days since their symptoms first appeared and at least 1 day (24 hours) with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improved symptoms, whichever is longer. See the Chicago Department of Public Health's [guidance on what to do if you are sick](#). If your symptoms are severe, such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or difficulty waking up, or bluish lips or face, please seek the closest emergency department or call 9-1-1 immediately.

**If you/your child do not have symptoms**, it is recommended to be tested 5 to 9 days after your exposure to a positive case, which was \_DATE\_. Close contacts of positive cases are encouraged to call their healthcare provider to arrange for testing. If other testing options are needed, refer to the [City of Chicago's coronavirus testing website](#). Remember that even if you test negative, you must still complete the full 14-day quarantine. If you test positive, you must stay home for at least 10 days after your test date.

For any additional COVID-19 questions or support, please visit [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus) for the most reliable information. If you do not find the information you need on the website, email [coronavirus@chicago.gov](mailto:coronavirus@chicago.gov).

The health and wellness of our staff and students are the highest priority of \_(SCHOOL)\_. We continue to follow Chicago Department of Public Health and CDC guidelines as we ensure proper protocols and preventative measures are in place for the health and safety of our staff and students. Please contact us at \_(SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION)\_ if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

(SCHOOL LEADERSHIP NAME)

## **GENERAL COMMUNICATION**

Subject: Confirmed COVID-19 Case at \_(SCHOOL)\_

Dear Staff and Families,

We are writing to update you on a recent development regarding the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). We have learned that a \_(SCHOOL)\_ community member has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

[The individual was last at the school on (DATE) - only to be included if it can be done without obviously identifying the individual. If needed, give a broad date like "the week of \_\_\_\_\_."] To ensure the health and safety of our families and staff, following CDC guidance, \_(SCHOOL)\_ [will ensure/has conducted] appropriate cleaning and disinfection of our school.

Students and staff who have been identified as having been in close contact with this individual [will be/have been] notified via a separate communication. As a reminder, close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more. Those who had brief, casual contact with an infected individual are not considered at great risk of transmission and, for most people, the illness is generally mild and can be safely managed at home. As always, everyone should monitor their health and stay at home if they develop symptoms. Anyone who develops severe symptoms should seek medical care immediately.

We continue to follow Chicago Department of Public Health and CDC guidelines as we ensure proper protocols and preventative measures are in place for the health and safety of our staff and students.

### **Public Health Guidance**

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever (temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. If you or your child develop symptoms of COVID-19, please contact your medical provider to discuss evaluation and testing.

For severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or difficulty waking up, or bluish lips or face, please seek the closest emergency department or call 9-1-1 immediately.

Any individuals who are sick with or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and away from others for at least 10 days since their symptoms first appeared and at least 1 day (24 hours) with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improved symptoms, whichever is longer.

For any additional COVID-19 questions or support, please visit [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus) for the most reliable information. If you do not find the information you need on the website, email [coronavirus@chicago.gov](mailto:coronavirus@chicago.gov). The health and wellness of our staff and students are the highest priority of \_(SCHOOL)\_. Please contact us at \_(SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION)\_ if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE  
(SCHOOL LEADERSHIP NAME)