



# Interim Guidance on Management of COVID-19 Cases in PreK-12 Schools and Early Childcare Settings

The following guidance refers to management of COVID-19 cases in schools and early childcare settings within the City of Chicago. For information on mitigation strategies by Community Level see [CPDH Interim Guidance on COVID-19](#)

For additional questions please contact the CDPH Youth Settings Team at [schoolscd@chicago.gov](mailto:schoolscd@chicago.gov) or (312) 746-6015.

## **Table of Contents**

1. **Key Points**
2. **Overview**
3. **COVID-19 Reporting to CDPH**
4. **School Contact Identification**
  - a. **Contact Identification First Steps**
  - b. **Determining Who Is a Close Contact**
5. **Isolation/Quarantine Recommendations**
  - a. **Definitions**
  - b. **For students or staff with a positive test**
  - c. **For students or staff with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19**
  - d. **For student or staff identified as close contact**
  - e. **Outbreak testing**
6. **Recommendations for Students and Staff Following Travel**
7. **Additional Information**
  - a. **Figure 1. COVID-19 Action Guide for Students and Employees of K-12 Schools in Chicago**
  - b. **Notifications**
  - c. **Cleaning**
  - d. **What Schools Can Expect After Reporting a Case**
  - e. **Notification Templates**

## Key Points (updated 8/11/2022)

- Report all cases to <http://redcap.link/chicovidreport> (select option 2 “Community congregate setting: single case or cluster of 2 or more cases”)
  - See “[COVID-19 Reporting to CDPH](#)”
- Students and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 must isolate at home and stay away from the school/ECE premises for **a minimum of 5 days after symptom onset or test date** (if no symptoms) and until [requirements for the end of isolation are met](#). Positive individuals should mask for an additional 5 days (days 6-10 after symptom onset or test date, if asymptomatic) upon return to school. ([CDC Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Childcare Programs to Support In Person Learning](#))
- **Schools may continue to use the 10 day isolation (for those that test positive for COVID-19) if their population is unable to mask or is at high risk of severe illness due to underlying medical issues.**
- As soon as possible after being notified that someone in the K–12 school has tested positive for or been diagnosed with COVID-19, K–12 school officials should notify [contacts](#) of exposure, in accordance with applicable privacy and other laws.
- Students and staff who have been in [close contact](#) with someone who has COVID-19 **no longer have to quarantine from school, but they should mask for 10 days from the date of the exposure and test on day 5 (day 0 is date of exposure)**. Any close contacts who have [symptoms](#) or [test positive for SARS-CoV-2](#) should begin [isolation](#) regardless of [vaccination status](#).
  - See “[For student or staff identified as close contact](#)”
- For schools and ECEs in Chicago, all case investigation and [contact identification](#) activities conducted should be consistent with CDPH policies and applicable federal and workplace, healthcare/medical, privacy, informed consent, data security, and confidentiality laws, regulations, and requirements.

## Overview

K-12 schools should prepare policies and procedures to take a stepwise approach in response to COVID-19 case reports.

1. School receives report of COVID-19 case or identifies person with COVID-19 like symptoms
2. Isolate case.
3. Identify, and notify contacts.
4. Report to CDPH.
5. Notify school community.

CDPH will contact schools to discuss any pending issues following the report to CDPH. The CDPH Youth Settings Team is also available for consultation and to answer questions from school administrators via email ([schoolscd@cityofchicago.gov](mailto:schoolscd@cityofchicago.gov)) or phone (312-746-6015).

## COVID-19 Reporting to CDPH

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 and staff that have tested positive
- Total number of students and staff that are in the classroom/cohort
- The first positive individual in each classroom/cohort’s reported or observed symptom onset date
- The last positive individual in the classroom/cohort’s last date at school
- The positive individual’s test date
- Additional optional information includes information about positive case potential exposure (recent travel, social gatherings, contact with positive case), testing type (rapid antigen vs PCR).

**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. When in doubt, quarantine the classroom in question, and reach out to CDPH on the next business day. 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. During times of a surge, CDPH will prioritize cases that may demonstrate in-school transmission.

## Isolation 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. **People in quarantine have NOT been diagnosed with COVID-19.** 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 of COVID-19:** Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus but are most likely to occur within the first 5 days after exposure. 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 5 days (return day 6 or after) 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 symptoms have improved. Day 0 is date of symptom onset (or positive test, if asymptomatic).
  - After isolation period, individuals may return to school but must continue to wear a well-fitting mask through day 10, when around others.
    - If masks need to be removed (e.g., for lunch), individuals **should** ensure they wear their masks when not actively participating in these activities.
    - **Schools/ECEs may continue to use the 10 day isolation protocol if the individual cannot mask due to medical or age considerations, such as those that serve the population of 2 and younger for whom masking is not recommended.**
    - To shorten masking time upon return from isolation, individuals who are without a fever for  $\geq 24$  hours may present two negative rapid antigen tests  $\geq 48$  hours apart, with the first test taken no sooner than day 6 post symptom onset.
      - If either test result is positive, the individual must continue to wear a mask and should continue to mask until they can present 2 consecutive negative tests taken  $\geq 48$  hours apart
- A positive result on any viral test [antigen, rapid antigen, molecular (Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT) such as an RT-PCR] should be considered positive for public health purposes. A confirmatory test is not needed.

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

- CDPH strongly recommends testing for all staff and students with new onset of symptoms of COVID-19 (see *Symptoms of COVID-19* above and [ISBE School Decision Tree](#)).
- If anyone on school campus or in a daily symptom screening check is identified with COVID-like symptoms, administrators should take immediate action, regardless of the person's vaccination status.
  - Separate the symptomatic person from other students/staff and ensure the symptomatic person and anyone they have contact with wears a mask, until transportation home or to a healthcare provider can be arranged. This will require a dedicated area in the facility and disinfection afterward. See guidance on [what to do if you are sick](#) for details on how to effectively separate someone with COVID-like symptoms. Consider ways to maintain

- privacy as may be required.
  - Refer the person with COVID-like symptoms to a healthcare provider or testing center to receive clinical evaluation and [diagnostic testing](#) for SARS-CoV-2. People being evaluated for COVID-19 should inform their healthcare provider of their vaccination status at the time they arrive for care.
  - If a student or staff member tests positive, they should be instructed to isolate (see “For students or staff with a positive test” section above).
  - Even 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/ECE Contact Identification

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.

### Contact Identification 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, they are not a positive COVID-19 case.
    - 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 Contact

### Considerations for determining close contacts:

- 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.
- 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.
- Include any extracurricular activity groups (e.g., sports, music, before- and after-school programs) and shared transportation in the assessment.
- In general, CDPH supports a broad definition of cohorts and broad quarantine of cohorts to facilitate timely quarantine and reduce transmission. This should be balanced against educational and practical considerations.
- For further assistance in determining close contacts, please refer to [Steps for Determining Close Contact in K-12 Schools](#).

### For students or staff identified as [close contacts](#):

- Students or staff with close contact to a person testing positive for COVID-19 should be:
  - Notified of their exposure by the school, **ideally no later than 24 hours** after identification of the positive case,
  - Required to mask for 10 days after the exposure occurred (date of exposure is day 0).
  - The individual may stay in school, regardless of vaccine status, [as long as they remain symptom-free](#) AND the individual can always maintain masking through day 10.
  - It is best practice, though not required, to test on day 5 after exposure and follow isolation guidance if the test is positive.
  - **If individuals are unable to mask due to age or underlying medical conditions, a consecutive testing strategy is appropriate to keep students in school following an exposure, as follows:**
    - Individuals should be tested daily using a rapid antigen test.
    - If an individual develops symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (above), they must stay home and isolate from others, as described previously.
    - If an individual has a positive test result, they must also stay home and isolate from others and can return if they are without a fever for  $\geq 24$  hours and can present two negative rapid antigen tests  $\geq 48$  hours apart, with the first test taken no sooner than day 6 post symptom onset.

## Outbreak mitigation

Outbreak status in a Pre-K-12 school occurs when 10% of individuals (students and staff) within a specified cohort (such a classroom or sports team) or when at least 3 cases within the cohort meet the criteria for being a confirmed or probable school-associated COVID-19 cases within 14 days of each other. For ECE, outbreak is defined as 2 or more cases, with no link to one another outside of the ECE center, within a 14 day period.

While a classroom, cohort, or entire facility is under investigation for an outbreak, CDPH will advise that schools/ECEs adopt additional layers of mitigation as needed to contain further spread of the outbreak. Such measures may include:

### Masking

- All members of a cohort (students of staff) that are having an outbreak or potential outbreak should mask for 10 days after the most recent case was in the classroom (date of exposure = day 0).

### Outbreak testing

- All individuals in a cohort or classroom experiencing an outbreak should be tested at least twice per week for two weeks following the last case in the outbreak.
- Day 0 of outbreak testing will be the date of symptom onset (or positive test if asymptomatic) of the last case epidemiologically linked to the outbreak within the cohort.
- Because of the rapid need to respond to outbreaks, schools should proactively obtain parental consent for student testing and create a testing protocol should outbreaks occur in the school. An opt-out consent is recommended in outbreak scenarios to facilitate prompt public health action.

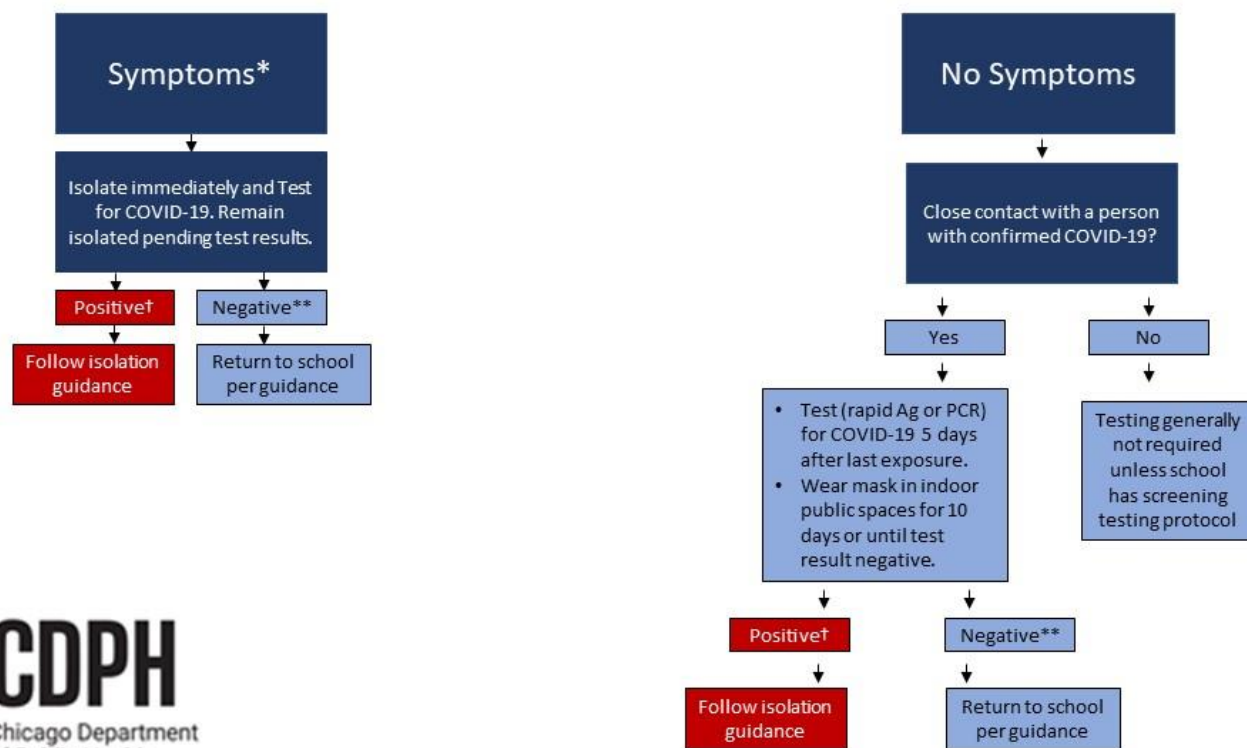
## Recommendations for Students and Staff Following Travel

Generally, CDPH aligns with [IDPH](#) and [CDC](#) on actions for travelers. Please refer to [Chicago's COVID-19 Travel Advisory](#) for details. Schools are recommended, though not required, to follow this Advisory for their students and staff. The Advisory is updated weekly.

***Parents and guardians should check with their local school for specific policies. ([CPS Travel Policy](#), [Archdiocese Travel Policy](#))*** CDPH recommends that individuals follow the full CDC recommendations for international travel, which can be found [here](#).

Figure 1.

## COVID Decision Tree for Schools and Early Childcare Facilities in Chicago



\* New onset of symptoms 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. ([IDPH Exclusion Protocols](#))

† 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.

§ Schools should ensure that symptom monitoring and testing if symptoms develop continue.



## 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 and get tested for COVID-19 as appropriate based on vaccination status and return to school guidance detailed above.
  - Close contacts should monitor their symptoms for 10 days and get tested 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 11/15/21). **Full school closures are not automatically required for cleaning if appropriate cohorting has occurred. Any decisions about full school closures for public health purposes (not operational purposes) should be made in consultation with CDPH.** Refer to [IDPH Public Health Interim Guidance for Pre-K-12 Schools](#) for additional instructions on environmental cleaning and disinfection.

## What Schools Can Expect After Reporting a Case

1. CDPH's Youth Settings team reviews case reports to identify [clusters and outbreaks](#).
2. CDPH's Youth Settings team reviews case reports to identify [clusters and outbreaks](#).
3. After receiving a report, CDPH may contact your school to discuss infection controls in place at your school and ways to protect your staff and students.
4. CDPH may 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.
5. You should notify CDPH of 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").
6. **During times of high case numbers, CDPH and school investigations will prioritize situations with multiple cases to prevent in-school transmission, [per CDC guidance](#).**

## Resources

Refer to the following resources for further information:

- a. [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus)
- b. [www.chicago.gov/reopening](http://www.chicago.gov/reopening)
- c. [CDC Smartbrief: Transmission of SARS-CoV2 in K-12 Schools](#)
- d. [CDC:Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Childcare Settings](#)
- e. [Summary of Guidance for Minimizing the Impact of COVID-19 on Individual Persons, Communities, and Health Care Systems – United States, August 2022](#)
- f. [CDC SARS-CoV-2 Transmission in K-12 Schools and ECE](#)
- g. [IDPH: Interim Guidance on Testing for COVID-19 in Community Settings in Schools](#)
- h. [IDPH Decision Tree for Symptomatic Individuals](#)
- i. [IDPH School Exclusion Protocols](#)
- j. [IDPH Guidance for Child's Face Covering Medical Tolerance](#)
- k. [ISBE: School Wellness- Coronavirus](#)
- l. [IDPH- Public Health School Guidance- Updated 1.11.22](#)
- m. [State of Illinois Executive Order 2022-03](#)

## Notification Templates

### 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 should monitor your health starting now through (DATE OF 10 DAYS AFTER LAST EXPOSURE TO POSITIVE CASE). 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, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

You may stay in school/work as long as you are fully masked while in school.

**If you 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 5 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 do not have symptoms**, it is recommended to be tested 5 days after your exposure to a positive case, which was (DATE OF EXPOSURE), **even if you are up-to-date on vaccination**. 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](#). If you test positive, you must stay home for at least 5 days after your test date AND at least 24 hours with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) AND symptom improvement, and fully masked for at least 10 days since your symptoms first appeared.

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, reach out to your School Administrator for further guidance.

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)

## **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 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 in the school setting applies to students who, for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24 h period, were less than 3 feet apart while appropriately masked OR between 3 and 6 feet apart if the infected student and the exposed student(s) did not correctly and consistently wear well-fitting masks. Those who had brief, casual contact with an infected individual are not considered at great risk of transmission; 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, 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 5 days since their symptoms first appeared AND at least 24 hours with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) AND improved symptoms. They must wear a properly-fitting mask upon return to school through day 10.

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, contact your school administrators. 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)