Frequently Asked Questions for School Leaders

Protecting Student and Staff Privacy

**What information can a school / district share in the event of a positive case or outbreak of COVID-19?**

Schools are required to protect student privacy under the federal FERPA law. Schools can maintain this privacy right by adhering to the letter templates above, consulting with legal counsel, or reviewing [FERPA requirements](https://ecfr.io/Title-34/Part-99) in light of their own tools for communication.

We value protecting the identities of individuals. Schools are discouraged from providing any personally identifiable information and should consider the cohort size when notifying a small group of direct exposure. \*Schools continue to be required to share students/staff specific information with the LPHA as required [in Section 1a of RSSL](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Ready%20Schools%20Safe%20Learners%202020-21%20Guidance.pdf).

**Can parents and students find out who the COVID-positive cases are?**

No. The identities of individuals who test positive for COVID-19 will be kept confidential to protect their privacy. This information is only shared with the LPHA.

A Single Positive Case of COVID-19

**Can a school / district stay open when it has one positive case of COVID-19?**

Yes. The school must take these immediate action steps outlined in Scenario 5 above:

* Send student/staff home, if not already isolated.
* School nurse or designated staff contact LPHA to confirm case and to begin collaboration on contact tracing.
* After confirming positive case, use Common Communication protocol to notify class/cohort/staff that LPHA is aware of COVID-19 case, and will assist in determining and notifying exposed individuals.
* Document on cohort logs when 6 feet physical distancing was not maintained during school day.
* Provide cohort logs to LPHA, to assist with identifying exposed individuals.
* If LPHA determines an entire cohort requires quarantine, follow Common Communication protocol.
* Collaborate with LPHA to determine if cohort quarantine is indicated.
* Use Common Communication protocol when communicating decision to quarantine the cohort.

Initial Response to a Positive Case(s) at School

**How will school districts find out if there are COVID-positive cases in their schools?**

Local public health authorities will be informed of positive cases within schools and will notify the school district superintendent or designee. Families and/or staff may also contact the school directly. Schools and LPHAs should plan for continual communication regarding known cases.

**What will schools have to do in response to positive cases?**

Decisions about when or how schools need to respond to a COVID-19 event depends on the specific scenarios; [refer to scenario table above](#sxd9iofnpp8b). School and classroom sizes are highly variable across Oregon and therefore, the response and protocols may vary and will require school leaders to make critical decisions in partnership with the LPHA. *For all COVID-19 events, school and district leaders are required to partner with the local public health authority (LPHA).* The school and school district will coordinate on specific action steps as detailed in the scenario table. School and district leaders will serve as trusted communicators in notifying staff, students, families, and their community about the situation and the action steps taken by the school and district. It is critical that the school and district work with local health officials to protect the privacy of those impacted.

**How will schools, parents, students and staff be informed, and how quickly?**

Schools will be informed about cases by their local public health authorities. Schools should have as many communication methods as possible for communicating to parents, students and staff to ensure as many people as possible are reached. These methods can include text messages, push notifications, voice messages and email, which direct people to additional information on the web, but it should be done within XX hours after being informed of the cases by the local public health authorities and notifying the school district and Oregon Department of Education.

**Will each school need to be cleaned after a COVID-positive case is reported there?**

Yes, and the size of the cleaning area depends on the number of people infected and where they and their close contacts spent time. For example, it may only be necessary to clean, beyond normal procedures, one part of the building if those who tested positive only spent time in that area of the school. If the school is experiencing a large outbreak that affects multiple parts of the facility, a school may choose to close the school and move to a hybrid or Comprehensive Distance Learning model.

**Will everyone in the school be tested?**

Unless individuals are displaying symptoms or COVID-19 or they were in close contact with confirmed cases, OHA does not recommend universal testing for everyone in a school facility if there are only a handful of cases. Testing may be recommended for a large group of people—up to and including everyone in a school—that may include asymptomatic individuals if it’s determined that such testing would be useful in limiting the spread of the virus in a facility. This will be determined by the LPHA and OHA.

When to Close School(s) to In-Person Instruction

**How many positive cases are needed to close a school to In-Person Instruction?**

This depends on the size of the school, the cohort interactions, and the number of cases within different cohorts. Schools are encouraged to use small stable cohorts with little interaction with other cohorts to limit the potential for full school closure to In-Person Instruction.

The school will:

* Take immediate action to send students/staff home who have tested positive for COVID-19, if not isolated already.
* Contact the LPHA to confirm the case and begin collaboration on contact tracing, by providing cohort logs to identify exposed individuals.
* Use established communication protocol and customize communication templates to notify affected class/cohort/staff that LPHA is aware of COVID-19 case, and will assist in determining and notifying exposed individuals.

If the LPHA recommends an entire cohort (or other identified group) requires quarantine, a notification will be sent to those impacted to isolate at home for 10 days after symptoms first appear and until 24 hours after fever us resolved, without use of fever-reducing medicine and other symptoms are improving. More information can be found in [Scenario 7](#37ylwf7wx5k2).

If the percentage of cases within a particular school population goes above a level at which managing or containing an outbreak becomes more difficult, schools should consider closing In-Person Instruction to limit the spread of the virus among students and staff, and to allow the facility to be thoroughly cleaned.

**Can a school be partially closed to In-Person Instruction when there are COVID-positive cases?**

Yes. It depends on the size of the school and the number of people infected. A school could potentially continue offering in-person instruction if, for example, local public health authorities, in their investigation, determine that the outbreak was contained within a certain part of the facility, and that confirmed cases and their close contacts spent time only in certain areas.

[Authority to Close School(s) to In-Person Instruction](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Ready%20Schools%20Safe%20Learners%202020-21%20Guidance.pdf)

**Who has the authority to close schools?**

Decisions about when or how schools need to respond to an outbreak of COVID-19 involve collaboration across multiple jurisdictions. If part or an entire school needs to close to in-person instruction and transition from On-Site or Hybrid Instructional models to *Comprehensive* Distance Learning models as a matter of public health, *or return from Comprehensive Distance Learning Models to Hybrid or On-Site models*, it is also important that educators, students, families, and the general public have a clear understanding of how decisions are made and who makes those decisions.

When determining if part or an entire school needs to close, schools should work in a collaborative manner with Local Public Health Authorities (LPHAs). LPHAs are vital partners to advise and consult on health and safety in schools with school officials but in general decisions of public health at the local level reside with school and district officials. There can be exceptions within local law and any additional authorities should be clarified at the local level.

Public Reporting of School Cases

**Why is it important to report outbreaks of positive COVID-19 cases?**

Public reporting of outbreaks can help people better understand how disease transmission is happening in their communities. For example, if there are suddenly many more cases in a smaller county, reporting of a school outbreak responsible for many new cases can better illustrate why cases have spiked. This information also can prompt people within a particular area or location to take steps to protect themselves, such as by social distancing or wearing face coverings.

Role of State and Local Public Health Authorities

**What is OHA’s role in responding to outbreaks in school districts around the state?**

OHA supports local public health authorities and schools in responding to cases and outbreaks through data sharing, technical assistance—recommendations for limiting the spread of the virus within a facility—and case investigation, which includes interviewing individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and tracing their close contacts.

**What is the LPHA’s role in responding to outbreaks in school districts around the state?**

Local public health authorities, with support from the Oregon Health Authority, conduct case investigation and contact tracing activities, as well provide recommendations on ways to limit the spread of the virus in a particular location, such as separating groups of people, quarantine and isolation, and good disinfection and hygiene practices.