

Recommendations for Responding to COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Higher Education

8/31/2021

Updates to this guidance include:

- Updated the use of the term “face covering” to “well-fitted mask.”
- Updates to CDC recommendations around when to test (three to five days after exposure, versus five to seven days), pages 2 and 5.

This guidance is to help colleges and universities plan for and respond to COVID-19 cases and outbreaks on campus. The recommendations below can aid colleges and universities in preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19 and collecting data that will help track respiratory illness and COVID-19 in students, faculty, and staff.

The recommendations are based on COVID-19 guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). This guidance document was created by MDH in partnership with Minnesota’s institutes of higher education. It should be used alongside the following documents:

- [Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf)
- [Recommendations for Different Scenarios of COVID-19 Transmission Among Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf)

Additional resource

- [Recommended COVID-19 Decision Tree for People in Schools, Youth, and Child Care Programs \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf)

Steps to take when someone on campus tests positive for COVID-19

Once you are notified about someone with a positive test, determine the start of the infectious period and who is a close contact of the case.

- Information on infectious periods and determining close contacts:
 - [If You Are Sick or Test Positive: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html).
 - Refer to the [Guidance on isolation and quarantine](#) section below for information on how to support students, staff, and faculty in isolation.
 - For information on close contacts, refer to [Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](#).
 - Notify unvaccinated close contacts and let them know they should get tested three to five days after their exposure and quarantine.
 - Notify those who are identified as close contacts and are fully vaccinated at time of exposure (two weeks after the second dose in a two-dose series or two weeks after the first dose in a one-dose series) and do not have any symptoms of COVID-19, that they **do not** need to quarantine.
 - However, they should get tested three to five days after an exposure and wear a mask, according to MDH and CDC recommendations. For more information, refer to [Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](#).
 - Roommates of someone who has COVID-19 are the most at risk of developing COVID-19. Tell roommates the importance of following guidelines about staying away from the infected person and following the above appropriate guidance.
 - MDH can provide sample notification letters for close contacts.
 - Refer to the [Guidance on isolation and quarantine](#) section below for how to support students, staff, and faculty in quarantine.
- REMINDER: Contact tracing is a shared responsibility of the college/university, MDH, and local public health departments that do contact tracing in their counties.
 - Contact tracing should be conducted in a way that protects the confidentiality and privacy of an employee or student with COVID-19, consistent with any federal, state, or local laws, and institutional policies.

Detection of multiple COVID-19-positive faculty, staff, or students

- If three or more students, staff, and/or faculty test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of each other and the infections seem linked to a particular classroom or activity, then broader testing, quarantine, or both may be considered.

- Broader testing may be appropriate, for instance, when three or more infections are tied to an athletic team, a social event, or a classroom where people did not stay 6 feet away from each other.
- MDH or local public health may also recommend broader testing (regardless of vaccination status) and broader quarantine of unvaccinated people if a floor or section of a residence hall has multiple cases. These students should stay on their floors or sections, depending on the recommendation. Testing of these students is recommended at the start of quarantine and on day seven and day 14.
- In reviewing a cluster of cases, the following questions may help you better understand the spread you have on campus.
 - Are the three or more cases random, or do they have a connection to each other?
 - Are the three or more cases roommates, did they attend social gatherings, or have they had any ongoing interactions that may explain the cluster?
- If an increase in COVID-19 cases among students, faculty, or staff continues to occur over a 14-day period, state and local public health officials may work with campus staff to review sources of the infections and to reassess recommendations for campus activities.
- Review [Recommendations for Different Scenarios of COVID-19 Transmission Among Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf).

Transporting people who are sick or in quarantine

- For transportation to a clinic, either provide or encourage people to use a private vehicle, if possible. They should also wear a well-fitted mask while in a vehicle with others.
- Refer to the following guidance for more information on potential transportation options and ways to minimize the spread of COVID-19:
 - [Guidance for Facilities Providing Transportation Services during COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidetransport.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidetransport.pdf)
 - [CDC: Considerations for Non-emergency Vehicle Transportation for Tribal Communities During COVID-19 \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/tribal/non-ems-transportation.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/tribal/non-ems-transportation.html)

Guidance on isolation and quarantine

Isolation guidelines for people with COVID-19

Isolation means keeping anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 away from people who do not or may not have COVID-19.

- People in isolation should have their own bedroom and bathroom, if possible – especially if their roommate is not vaccinated.
 - In situations where a student needing isolation shares a suite, apartment, or house with others, the student should attempt to find a separate isolation space – meaning, a space where they can have a separate bedroom and bathroom from others. If this is not possible, the student should, at a

minimum, have their own bedroom and be given instructions on how to isolate in place, including how to safely share a bathroom with others.

- If students in isolation need to share a bedroom with others who have COVID-19, ensure that all students sharing a space have tested positive for COVID-19. Only students who test positive for COVID-19 should be grouped together.
- Faculty, staff, and students with COVID-19 who live off campus should stay at home and further reduce the spread of COVID-19 within their household by following [CDC: If You Are Sick or Caring for Someone \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html).

What colleges and universities should provide students in isolation

All students

- Alternative modes of course instruction.
- Academic accommodations if the student is not well enough to do coursework.

Students living on campus or those who are using on-campus resources for isolation

- Access to a phone.
- Supplies, such as a thermometer, masks, sanitizing wipes, tissues, soap, hand sanitizer, toiletries, medications, and contact information for people the student should call in an emergency.
- Delivered meals and laundry services.
- Virtual health checks.
- Regular check-ins by health services staff (ideally virtual) to assess the student's status and well-being.

Resources to share with cases in isolation

- [If You Are Sick or Test Positive: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html)
- [What To Do if You Have COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/case.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/case.pdf)
- [CDC: If You Are Sick or Caring for Someone \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html)
- [CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html)

Quarantine guidelines for people exposed to COVID-19

People who do not need to quarantine

- People who have been fully vaccinated (at least 14 days after vaccination series completion) and are not experiencing any symptoms do not need to quarantine if they were exposed to someone with COVID-19. However, they should get tested three to five days after exposure and wear a mask for 14 days or until they have a negative test result, according to MDH and CDC recommendations. Refer to [Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html).

- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days, and have fully recovered and are not experiencing any symptoms, also do not need to quarantine if they were exposed to someone with COVID-19.

Quarantine means keeping people who have been exposed to COVID-19 away from other people.

- MDH and CDC recommend a 14-day quarantine as the safest option to protect against further COVID-19 transmission. In some circumstances, colleges or universities may allow for people who have been exposed to quarantine for shorter periods of time:
 - Information on shortened quarantine options can be found at [Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html).
 - Campuses can consider a 10-day quarantine period, even among roommates, as long as separate isolation and quarantine spaces can be maintained for those roommates.
 - For students who are in on-campus congregate residences, the seven-day quarantine period is not recommended due to the risk of transmission in these settings.
- If it is necessary for people in quarantine to share a bathroom, consider the following strategies:
 - For a single bathroom, have the student who is in quarantine clean and disinfect after using.
 - For a common bathroom, have a designated stall and sink for the student who is in quarantine and require the quarantined student to wear a well-fitted mask whenever leaving their room to use the bathroom facilities.
- If it is necessary for people in quarantine to share a bedroom, consider the following strategies:
 - Beds should be spaced at least 6 feet apart.
 - Urge students to wear a well-fitted mask at all times when in their room except when eating, sleeping, or drinking, or if they have a medical reason that prevents them from wearing the cloth mask.
 - Prioritize off-site, individual quarantine for students who have underlying conditions that increase their risk for severe illness due to COVID-19, if necessary.
- If students need to leave their room for food, laundry, or other essential needs, they should:
 - Perform the task alone.
 - Ensure they are wearing a well-fitted mask the entire time.
 - Stay at least 6 feet away from others at all times. Avoid talking or interacting with others.
 - Leave their room at less busy times.
 - Return to their room as quickly as possible.
- Students may spend time outside as long as they are not interacting with others.
 - Ideally, people who go outside should do so by themselves and stay on property that is just outside their house or building to minimize contact with others.
 - A college or university's decision to allow people outside will depend on the facility and on whether students are otherwise following guidance for quarantine, wearing masks, and staying at least 6 feet from others.

Resources

- [CDC: Quarantine and Isolation \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html)
- [Quarantine Guidance for COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf)

Returning home for isolation or quarantine

- Provide information to students and their families on the duration of isolation or quarantine. Highlight the importance of staying home during isolation or quarantine and avoiding unnecessary visitors. Refer to the “When You Can be Around Others After You Had or Likely Had COVID-19” section on [CDC: Quarantine and Isolation \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html). MDH/local public health also have template letters for parents to help determine if a student can return home safely and follow recommended steps to prevent further transmission of COVID-19 at home.
 - Students should stay on campus for their isolation or quarantine period if they do not have a safe place to go off campus.
 - Students should not return home to households with people who have not yet received the vaccine or are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Resources

- [CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html)
- [CDC: Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html)

Precautions for staff when entering an isolation or quarantine room

- Staff who will have close contact with people in isolation or quarantine should wear medical or surgical masks, a face shield, and gown or gloves, if indicated. N95 masks can be used as well, but should be prioritized for health care workers when needed.
- Precautions and personal protective equipment (PPE) for facilities staff or staff who need to enter an isolation or quarantine residence for other non-health care reasons include the following:
 - Have the person in isolation or quarantine go into another room within the residence whenever possible.
 - If the person in isolation or quarantine must remain present, then:
 - The person in isolation or quarantine should wear a well-fitted mask or surgical mask.
 - Staff should wear appropriate PPE (surgical mask, face shield, and gloves) and perform hand hygiene after removing their mask and other items.

- Refer to the following grid for information about masks, gloves, and other protection: [COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) Grid for Congregate Care Settings \(www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ep/surge/crisis/ppegrid.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ep/surge/crisis/ppegrid.pdf).
- Staff correctly wearing appropriate protection are not considered exposed to COVID-19 even if they are within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more.
- Staff should stay at least 6 feet away from others whenever possible, even while wearing protection.
- If the person in isolation or quarantine is able to leave the room and is not present, then:
 - Staff who are NOT fully vaccinated should:
 - Wear face coverings.
 - Wear disposable gloves.
 - Wear any other protection that may be required while using specific cleaning agents.
 - Staff who are fully vaccinated:
 - Staff who are performing cleaning and disinfection should wear the appropriate protection needed that may be required while using specific cleaning agents and follow your institutions policy around masking.

Get more information on cleaning or disinfecting and air turnover rates at [CDC: Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html).

In general:

- **If less than 24 hours have passed** since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, clean and disinfect the space before use by others.
- **If more than 24 hours have passed** since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, cleaning is enough. You may choose to also disinfect, depending on certain conditions or everyday practices required by your facility.
- **If more than three days have passed** since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, no additional cleaning (beyond regular cleaning practices) is needed.



Minnesota Department of Health | health.mn.gov | 651-201-5000
625 Robert Street North PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.