



Public Health Interim Guidance for Local Health Departments and Pre-K-12 Schools - COVID-19 Exclusion Protocols

This document provides additional guidance for schools and local health departments (LHDs) for when students, faculty, or staff must be excluded from school consistent with [Executive Order 2022-03](#) and the Communicable Disease Code, [77 Ill. Admin. Code 690.361](#) and [690.30\(c\)](#).

Definitions

- “School personnel” means any person who (1) is employed by, volunteers for, or is contracted to provide services for, any public and nonpublic school in Illinois serving pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students, or is employed by an entity contracted to provide services for any public and nonpublic school in Illinois serving pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students; and (2) is in close contact (fewer than 6 feet) with other persons on the campus or in a campus-affiliated building or location for more than 15 minutes at least once a week on a regular basis. The term “school personnel” does not include persons present on the campus or at an affiliated off-campus location for only a short period of time and whose moments of close physical proximity to others on site are fleeting (e.g., contractors making deliveries to a site where they remain physically distanced from others or briefly enter a site to pick up a shipment).
- “Student” means an adolescent or child enrolled in a school.
- “Confirmed case” means a person with a positive result on a COVID-19 molecular amplification diagnostic test (e.g., polymerase chain reaction [PCR] test), irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms.
- “Close contact” means an individual who was within 6 feet of a confirmed or probable case for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period. However, a close contact is not:
 - A student who was within 3 to 6 feet in a classroom setting for least 15 minutes with a confirmed or probable student case if both case and contact were consistently masked for the entire exposure period.
 - Students and staff aged 18 years and older who have received all [recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) for any individual who completed the Pfizer-BioNTech primary vaccination series beyond the past five months, the Moderna primary vaccination series beyond the past five months, or Johnson & Johnson Janssen’s (J&J) primary vaccination dose beyond the past two months (and additional primary doses for some immunocompromised people).

- A student aged 5-17 years who completed the [primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine](#).
- An individual on school transportation within 3-6 feet if both the confirmed case and the exposed individual were consistently and correctly masked during the entire exposure period *and* windows were opened (front, middle, and back, or overhead) to allow for good ventilation or [HEPA filters](#) were in use during transit.
- An individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days from date of exposure.
- An individual who is solely exposed to a confirmed case while outdoors; however, schools may coordinate with their local health department to determine the necessity of exclusion for higher-risk outdoor exposures.

Exposed persons meeting the above criteria are not considered close contacts and do not need to be excluded from school, however they must wear a well-fitted mask when around others for 10 days after exposure.

- “Probable case” means a person with a positive result on a COVID-19 antigen diagnostic test, irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms, or with COVID-19-like symptoms who was exposed to a confirmed or probable case.

Situation #1 - Students, Faculty, or Staff Tests Positive (Confirmed Case): Exclude from In-Person Instruction

- If a COVID-19 test is performed at the school or the individual self-reports a positive test, the school should report the case to the LHD. 77 Ill. Admin. Code 690.200(a)(1)(J).
- Schools must gather information about the individual’s activity in school to provide such information to the LHD. Notification should include all available information about the individual’s movements and potential exposures to others within the school beginning with the 48 hours prior to the positive test result or symptom onset. This includes:
 - Total number of students/school personnel at the school and total number of classrooms.
 - Total number of classrooms impacted.
 - Total number of students and staff potentially exposed.
 - The COVID-19-positive individual’s reported/observed onset date of symptoms.
 - The COVID-19-positive individual’s last day at the school.
- School Next Steps
 - Exclude student or school personnel who are confirmed cases from the school consistent with the Situation #1 flowchart below.
 - Notify families, teachers, and support staff that a confirmed case was identified in the school while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ACA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The notification should be sent as soon as possible and include information on

symptom monitoring, what to do if symptoms develop, COVID-19 prevention strategies, and information on what the school is doing in response to the positive case. Such notification shall also specify that exclusion from school is separate from any isolation or quarantine order that may be entered by the LHD.

- Investigate the case's movement throughout the school from 48 hours prior to onset date (or specimen collection date if asymptomatic) and until case excluded from school.
- Identify close contacts to the case and exclude students and school personnel identified from school consistent with the Situation #3 flowchart and advise close contacts to remain in home away from others consistent with the Situation #3 flowchart.
- Criteria for Returning to School
 - Consistent with the CDC's [Isolation for K-12 Schools guidance, as well as Executive Order 2022-03, 77 Ill. Admin. Code 690.361, and DPH and ISBE guidance](#), schools should permit students and school personnel who are confirmed or probable cases to return to in-person instruction if at least five days have passed since symptom onset date (or date of specimen collection from the positive test if asymptomatic), they have been fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication, 24 hours from diarrhea or vomiting ceasing, and their other symptoms, such as sore throat or cough have improved, and they continue to wear a mask around others for five more days.
 - The LHD may supply alternative dates as to when a student or staff member can return to school up to a maximum of 10 days; otherwise, schools should permit return consistent with this guidance unless an isolation or quarantine order from the LHD is still in effect.

Situation #2 - Students and School Personnel Exhibiting COVID-19-like Symptoms at School: Exclude or Refuse Admission While Acute Symptoms are Present

- Students or school personnel who exhibit [COVID-19-like symptom\(s\)](#) should be immediately masked, if they are not already, and sent to a designated separation room that can be used for symptom evaluation, including testing if available, or while waiting until they can leave the school.
- [COVID-19-like symptoms](#) include the following: 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
- Students and school personnel exhibiting [COVID-19-like symptoms](#) should be:
 - safely transported home by parent or guardian as soon as possible, or
 - safely transported by parent or guardian to a health care facility for clinical evaluation and testing, if necessary.
- On-site screening (if school health personnel available)

- Any school health personnel conducting a screening of a symptomatic student should be wearing fit tested N95 mask, eye protection with face shield or goggles, gown, and gloves. The user should be trained on the type of personal protective equipment (PPE) required, and how to don (put on) and doff (remove) it correctly and safely. Respirators, such as N95s, must be used as part of a [written respiratory protection program](#). OSHA requires that N95 masks be fit tested prior to use. This is an important step to ensure a tight fit for the mask to be effective in providing protection. Schools should contact their LHD to determine where fit testing can be obtained in their area.
- If a fit-tested N95 respirator is not available, the next safest levels of respiratory protection include, in the following order, a non-fit-tested N95 respirator, a KN95 respirator on the [FDA-approved list](#), or a surgical mask.
- Testing
 - When possible, the sick individual should be tested on-site at the school for COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses, where indicated.
 - Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 in past 90 days do not need to be tested for COVID-19, should be assessed for other illnesses, and excluded or refused admittance from school consistent with the [IDPH Communicable Disease in Schools](#) guidance.
- Exclusion
 - Schools must exclude or refuse to admit students and school personnel, on the school premises, with COVID-19-like illness as follows:
 - If tested within 48 hours of onset and if the test is negative for SARS-CoV-2, the student or school personnel should remain out of school until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication, 24 hours after diarrhea/vomiting have ceased, and symptoms have improved. (If testing is not accessible or delayed, testing within 72 hours would be acceptable, but testing within 48 hours of onset should be promoted.)
 - If the student or school personnel test COVID-19-positive, refer to the section, **“Situation #1 - Procedures for Students and School Personnel who Test Positive.”**
 - If testing is not performed, the child must remain out of school for a minimum of five calendar days after symptom onset **and** until they have been fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication, 24 hours after diarrhea/vomiting have ceased, and symptoms have improved and they must wear a well-fitted mask at all times when around others in school through day 10. During times in the school day when students may typically remove masks indoors (such as during lunches, snacks, band practice, etc.), have a plan for them to adequately distance from others and ensure they wear their masks when not actively participating in these activities (such as when they are not actively eating).

- Schools must exclude household members of the symptomatic student or school personnel who have not completed COVID-19 vaccine primary series for individuals age 5-17, or have not completed recommended vaccine doses, including boosters, for individuals age 18 and older and additional primary shots for some immunocompromised people, who also attend or work at the school, unless the sick individual was tested within 24 hours of onset of symptoms. If the ill individual was tested within 24 hours of onset of symptoms, household members do not need to be sent home unless there is a high suspicion the ill person has COVID-19 (e.g., they are a known close contact, they have lost sense of taste and smell). Pending test results (if test performed within first 24 hours), household members can remain in school with consistent use of well-fitting masks both indoors and outdoors. If the ill individual tests positive for COVID-19, then any household members **not meeting the criteria for exemption from exclusion** in Situation #3 should be excluded from the school immediately and treated as a close contact (refer to Situation #3). Boosted household members need not quarantine but should get tested five days after exposure. If exposure is ongoing (i.e., unable to isolate from their sick contact), they should get tested again five days after last day of infectious period for their sick contact (i.e., 10 days from illness onset/test positive date).
- All areas used by the sick individual should be thoroughly [cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidelines](#) and as described below.

Situation #3 - Students and School Personnel who are Close Contacts to a Confirmed COVID-19 Case

- Identifying Close Contacts
 - Schools shall investigate confirmed and suspect cases of COVID-19 in schools to identify close contacts.
 - Districts and schools, as well as students and families, must work with their LHD to facilitate contact tracing of infectious students and school personnel.
 - Upon notification or identification of a confirmed case in the school, schools should prepare and provide information and records to the LHD to aid in the identification of potential close contacts, exposure sites, and mitigation recommendations.
 - School personnel should inform the LHD immediately about possible exposures within the school, including in transportation settings, classrooms, common areas, and extracurricular activities. Schools should designate a person or persons for this role and have them available after hours.
 - LHDs should collaborate with pre-K-12 school administration to support contract tracing efforts, when applicable, such as information of unvaccinated individuals who were in rooms, classes, meals, and extracurricular activities with the confirmed case.
 - LHDs may investigate clusters and outbreaks in schools, and may recommend exclusion pursuant to [77 Ill. Admin. Code 690.30](#) or issuing orders for voluntary

quarantine per the [Communicable Disease Code, 77 Ill. Admin Code 690, Subpart I.](#)

- Factors that may be considered when identifying close contacts include proximity, the duration of exposure (e.g., longer exposure time likely increases exposure risk), mask adherence and whether the exposure was to a person with symptoms (e.g., coughing likely increases exposure risk). Brief interactions are less likely to result in transmission; however, symptoms and the type of interaction (e.g., did the infected person cough directly into the face of the exposed individual) remain important. Schools should work with the LHD for additional guidance in particular situations if needed.
- Schools Must Exclude Close Contacts
 - Schools must exclude close contacts as required by [Executive Order 2022-03, 77 Ill. Admin. Code 690.361, and DPH and ISBE guidance.](#)
 - Schools must exclude students or school personnel identified as close contacts consistent with the Situation #3 flowchart.
 - Schools should exclude students even if an isolation or quarantine order has not been issued or has expired.
- Individuals who do not need to be excluded:
 - Students and staff who are currently asymptomatic, and have completed COVID-19 primary vaccine series for individuals age 5-17, and [recommended vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) for individuals age 18 and up, and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people. However, CDC recommends that all exposed individuals test five days after a close contact exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
 - Any asymptomatic staff or student with a confirmed COVID-19 viral test result within the last 90 days from exposure.
- As an alternative to exclusion, schools may permit close contacts who are asymptomatic to be on the school premises if the exposure occurred during the school day while the contact and case were fully masked and the contact tests negative using [Test to Stay protocols](#) following the exposure.
- School personnel and/or LHDs should interview the parents/guardians of a COVID-19-positive student or COVID-19-positive school personnel. The purpose for the interview is to identify everyone with whom the COVID-19-positive individual had close contact (within 6 feet for a cumulative 15 minutes or more while the individual was infectious) to identify additional individuals who should be excluded from school and/or subject to an order for isolation or quarantine.
 - The infectious period begins two days before the onset of symptoms (for a symptomatic person) or two days before the positive sample was obtained (for an asymptomatic person) and ends when the COVID-19-positive individual was excluded or placed in isolation.

- Parents/guardians and staff must cooperate with the LHD for purposes of conducting contact tracing or investigating any outbreak pursuant to the Control of Communicable Disease Code, [77 Illinois Administrative Code 690](#).
- Return to school criteria
 - If the close contact develops symptoms, COVID-19 diagnostic testing is recommended, regardless of vaccination status, and the school should follow protocols for excluding symptomatic individuals from school for five days, plus five additional days of masking around others (Situation #2).
 - If the close contact is not tested, they are treated as a probable case (Situation #2).
 - If the close contact tests positive, they should be treated as a confirmed case (Situation #1).
 - If the close contact tests positive but remains asymptomatic, all close contacts are recommended to be tested on day five after exposure to a positive case.
 - The LHD may supply dates as to when a student or staff member identified as a close contact can return to school, otherwise schools should permit return consistent with this guidance (five days).

Situation #4 - Outbreak Response and Consideration for Closure

- Identifying an outbreak
 - CDC and IDPH recommend using the following definitions of a school-associated outbreak: (A) multiple cases comprising at least 10% of students, teachers, or staff within a specified core group (e.g., extracurricular activity, cohort group, classroom, before/after school care, etc.); or (B) at least three cases within a specified core group meeting criteria for a probable or confirmed school-associated COVID-19 case with symptom onset or positive test result within 14 days of each other who were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting (i.e., household) outside of the school setting, *and* that are epidemiologically linked in the school setting or a school-sanctioned extracurricular activity. In other words, the cases have shared close contacts and location at school or a school-sanctioned activity and have onsets within 14 calendar days of each other. Conversely, cases that occurred in different timeframes (at least calendar 15 days apart), separate locations or locations outside of school, and having no common source of exposure would not constitute an outbreak.
- Outbreak strategies. Once an outbreak is identified, the LHD will further investigate to determine the extent of exposures at the school and what control measures are needed to mitigate the outbreak. Such strategies might include:
 - Quarantine orders from the LHD and/or school exclusion for all individuals present in the affected classroom, especially for infant and toddler classrooms where masking is not achievable and social distancing is challenging.

- Canceling non-essential activities and meetings.
- Keeping students in stable class groups or classrooms and moving teachers between classes.
- Increasing spacing between students in classes.
- Shortening the in-person school week.
- Staggering school start and lunch/break times across year groups or classes.
- Testing
 - When a school is in outbreak status (as defined and established by public health authorities), outbreak testing is strongly recommended for students and required for unvaccinated school personnel who are included in the outbreak.
 - Outbreak testing should begin as soon as possible from the date the outbreak is declared by the LHD and at least within three days.
 - IDPH recommends schools acquire parental consent for student in advance to quickly accommodate outbreak testing should the need arise. Testing for close contacts should occur as previously recommended. In addition, schools should conduct twice weekly testing during an outbreak targeted to the impacted classroom(s), grade(s), extracurricular participants, or entire student body, depending on the circumstances, unless the local health department recommends otherwise.
 - Schools must conduct twice weekly testing of school personnel who are included in the outbreak definition established by public health authorities.
 - Testing should continue until the school has gone two incubation periods, or 28 days, without identifying any new cases.
 - Schools should make plans to deploy outbreak testing when needed. A listing of free testing sites is available at <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/testing.html>.
 - Testing of students and staff who have completed their primary series and/or booster doses should be discussed with your local health department to determine if indicated.
- Pursuant to the superintendent's declaration under Section 10-30 of the Illinois School Code, a school or school district may only enter into an adaptive pause in consultation with the LHD and consistent with guidance or requirements from such LHD. In general, an adaptive pause should not be necessary if the school follows all appropriate mitigation strategies. When the large number of new cases makes it difficult for schools and LHDs to conduct prompt investigations to identify and to exclude/quarantine close contacts, or if there is an unsafe environment due to lack of masking and/or testing, adaptive pauses can be useful to ensure individuals who are potentially infectious are excluded from school. Schools taking adaptive pause should pause from all activities, including extracurricular activities. Adaptive pauses using remote learning may not be employed due to staffing shortages in schools.

Situation #1 - Students, Faculty, or Support Staff Tests Positive
School Response

Student/school staff member tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

School must send home student/staff or have transported by parent/guardian (as applicable) for further medical evaluation by a health care provider.

School should implement cleaning and disinfection of areas where case may have been present per [CDC guidance](#).

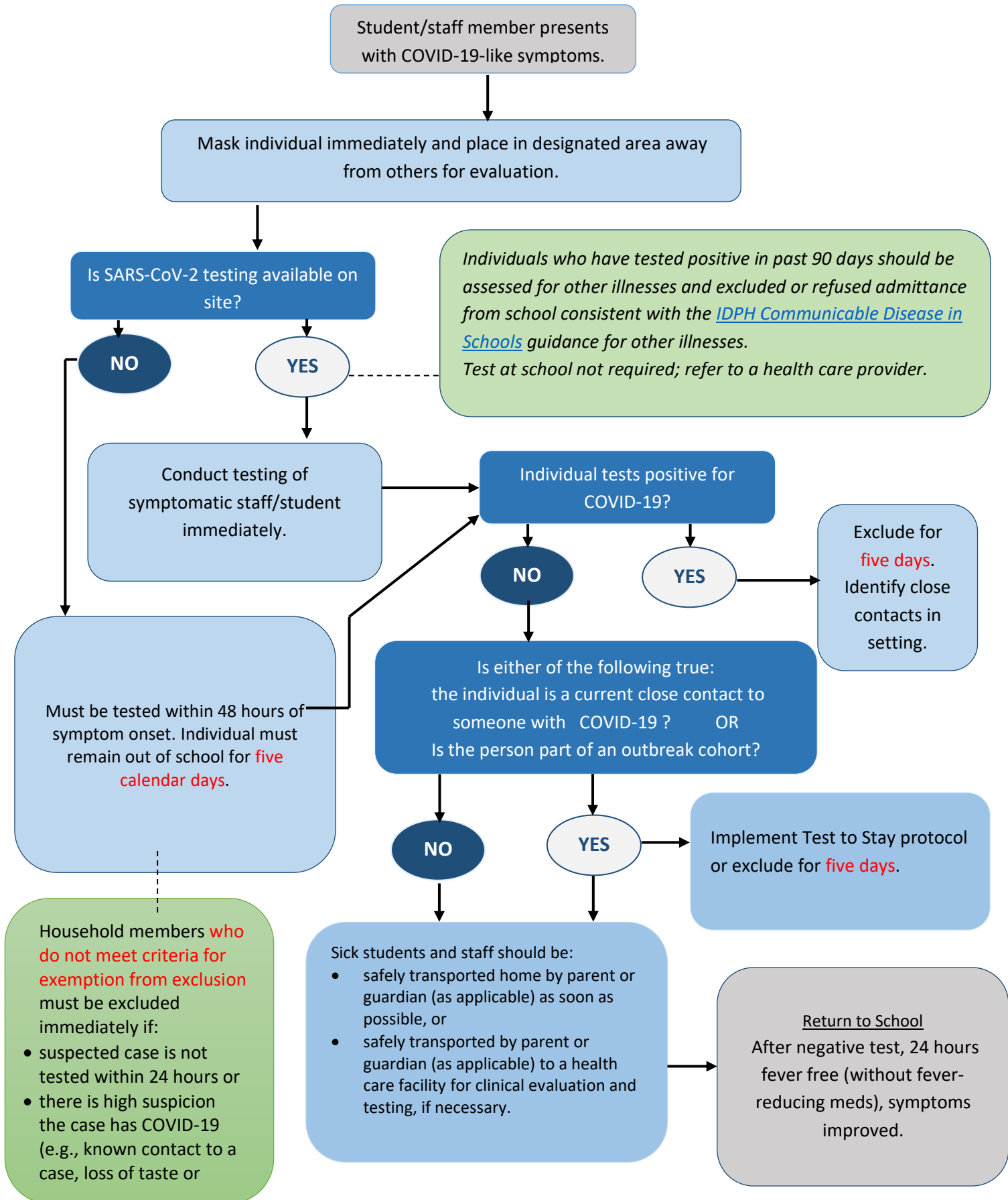
School should notify families, teachers, and staff that a confirmed case was identified in the school/day care, as soon as possible, while maintaining confidentiality.

Include information on symptom monitoring, what to do if symptoms develop, COVID-19 prevention strategies, and information on what the school/day care is doing in response to the positive case.

School should identify and exclude individuals identified as close contacts by school or LHD (see Situation #3).

Exclude case for **five days**.
*(May return on calendar **day six** after symptom onset, or positive test collection date if asymptomatic, and if fever free for 24 hours and symptoms improved. Continue to wear a mask around others for five more days.)*

Situation #2 - Students, Teachers, and Support Staff Exhibiting COVID-19-like Symptoms at School
Response



Situation 3: Students or School Personnel who are Close Contacts to a Confirmed COVID-19 Case

Schools should exclude or refuse to admit students and staff after close contact with a confirmed case consistent with the guidelines below, unless otherwise directed by their local health department. An isolation or quarantine order is not required for schools to exclude or refuse to admit students or staff.

