



## Respiratory Viral Disease Guidance for the 2023–2024 School Year

### ***FAQ's for PreK-12 Schools***

As we begin the new school year, this FAQ document is being distributed to answer some of the questions DPH and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) have received in the past several months, and to remind schools of guidance that was issued at the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration. During the 2023–2024 school year, we are expecting the co-circulation of several viral respiratory diseases, including COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). People can take simple actions like staying home when you're sick, washing your hands, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and wearing a high-quality mask when levels in your community are high, and staying up-to-date on COVID-19 and influenza vaccines—these are all the ways we can continue to protect ourselves.

#### **1. Should schools be continuing with increased cleaning and disinfection protocols at this time?**

DPH continues to recommend that schools engage in good universal cleaning practices, as would normally be expected to maintain a clean, safe, and healthy school environment. At this time, enhanced cleaning and disinfection practices for the purposes of preventing COVID-19 transmission are not necessary for schools. More information regarding good cleaning practices for schools can be found on the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/cleaning/facility.html>.

#### **2. Should schools be continuing with enhanced ventilation practices at this time?**

DPH continues to recommend that school ventilation practices follow guidance from the *American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers* (ASHRAE) pertaining to school buildings. These guidelines include recommendations for fresh air supplied to indoor spaces, filtration of recirculated air, as well as maintenance and monitoring considerations. More information regarding guidance for school building ventilation can be found at <https://www.ashrae.org/>.

#### **3. Do schools need to continue with quarantine and isolation of students who are exposed to a positive case or test positive themselves? Do we need to require masking for students returning after isolation?**

School districts are encouraged to develop their own policies to operationalize CDC guidance regarding quarantine, isolation, and masking at this time. People who are well can attend school and work, even if they have been exposed to a respiratory virus. DPH recommends that, as with any illness, students and staff should be encouraged to stay home if they are exhibiting symptoms of an illness. Updated quarantine, isolation, and masking guidance from CDC can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-childcare-guidance.html>

**4. Should schools continue to require medical clearance for return to athletics for students with a recent COVID-19 diagnosis?**

School districts can develop their own policies regarding the need for documented medical clearance to return to athletic or other activities following a COVID-19 diagnosis. DPH recommends that, when considering their own policies, schools keep in mind recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, which can be found here: <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>

**5. Do schools need to continue reporting cases among students and staff to the DPH School Submissions portal? How should suspected outbreaks be reported?**

During the 2023–24 school year individual cases of COVID-19 among staff and students do not need to be reported and the School Submissions Portal is no longer active.

Any suspected or confirmed outbreak in a school setting is immediately reportable by telephone to both DPH (860-509-7994) and the local health department where the school is located. Schools should continue to work closely with local public health to identify and investigate suspected outbreaks and implement mitigation strategies to limit disease transmission. [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DPH/EEIP/Reportable-Disease-Forms/PD23\\_2023-12\\_27\\_2022-Final-Fillable-Form.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DPH/EEIP/Reportable-Disease-Forms/PD23_2023-12_27_2022-Final-Fillable-Form.pdf)

**6. Will COVID-19 home tests be available to schools? Should schools give out COVID-19 home tests?**

During the 2023—24 school year, COVID-19 test kits will not be distributed by DPH. COVID-19 home tests are available commercially. Schools that have test kits from last year or obtain test kits can check for changes in expiration dates here: [At-Home OTC COVID-19 Diagnostic Tests | FDA](#) Schools can still have tests available for students and their families; testing is especially useful for persons at increased risk for complications from COVID-19 and could benefit from antiviral medication. Persons who are sick, even if they test negative for COVID-19, should stay home from work and school.

**7. Can we use nebulizers in the school setting?**

During the pandemic the use of nebulizers was recognized as an aerosol generating procedure and avoidance of nebulizers was recommended to limit the spread of COVID-19. CDC still recommends limiting use of nebulizers. If use cannot be avoided, specific recommendations to ensure the safety of others are to be followed <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>

Evidence demonstrates that properly using an inhaler with a spacer, practicing good technique and giving an appropriate dose, is at least as effective as using a nebulizer.<sup>1,2</sup> It is recommended that schools work with primary care providers and parents to prioritize use of this delivery method for inhaled medications.

1. Goh AE, Tang JP, Ling H, Hoe TO, Chong NK, Moh CO, Huak CY. Efficacy of metered-dose inhalers for children with acute asthma exacerbations. *Pediatric Pulmonology*. 2011; 46(5): 421-427. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ppul.21384>
2. Payares-Salamanca, L, Contreras-Arrieta, S, Florez-García, V, Barrios-Sanjuanelo, A, Stand-Niño, I, Rodriguez-Martinez, CE. Metered-dose inhalers versus nebulization for the delivery of albuterol for acute exacerbations of wheezing or asthma in children: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Pediatric Pulmonology*. 2020; 55: 3268-3278. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ppul.25077>