

Alexandria Health Department

Interim COVID-19 Handbook for Schools & Daycares

Updated: June 24, 2022

The Alexandria Health Department (AHD) developed this document as a reference guide for daycare, preschool, and K-12 administrators. As of January 2022, the [Virginia Department of Health is changing its approach to COVID-19](#) from investigating every case and doing contact tracing to prioritizing tracking outbreaks and clusters. This handbook was created as a supplement to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) guidelines. As we transition to a new phase in the COVID-19 pandemic, AHD encourages schools, early child care and education programs, daycares, preschools, and youth organizations to:

- Implement COVID-19 mitigation measures and prevention strategies
- Identify cases and exposures in their facilities
- Identify close contacts and inform families and staff of exposures
- Gather information and report suspected COVID-19 outbreaks to AHD
- Adopt **creative solutions** that fit their community's needs

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I. Implement Layered Prevention Measures

Layered prevention measures may be implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to support in-person learning and child care. Facilities should use age-appropriate [signage](#) to remind children of implemented prevention measures.

1. Promote Vaccination

- a. COVID-19 vaccination of all eligible persons is a leading strategy to help schools and daycares maintain in-person operations. Encourage staff and families to [get vaccinated and get a booster when eligible](#).
- b. Share information about [where to get vaccinated](#) with families and staff.
- c. Review the [6 ways schools can promote COVID-19 vaccination](#).
- d. Partner with AHD to host virtual meetings about vaccination with families and staff.

2. Consistent and Correct Mask Use

- a. Follow the [VDH masking guidelines](#) according to the [COVID-19 Community Level](#) in Alexandria City.
- b. Consistent and [correct mask use](#) has been an effective prevention strategy to reduce the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.

- ✓ When needed, encourage parents, teachers, and staff to find a mask that is comfortable, clean, and well-fitting.
- ✓ Discourage improper mask use (i.e., wearing masks that are dirty, wearing masks that do not fit correctly, wearing masks incorrectly, and wearing masks made of only one layer).
- c. Universal masking in the K-12 setting allows schools to apply the close contact [exemption for students](#) who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infectious student. The exemption **only applies** if **both** the infectious student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks.
- d. [Executive Order Number Two](#) and previous [Senate Bill 739](#) (§ **22.1-2.1**) apply to K-12 schools and **school-based** early child care and education programs. Both allow parents to choose whether or not their child wears a mask at school (see below for exceptions). Parents have the option to keep their child home during quarantine or isolation if they are unwilling to have their child wear a mask when needed.
 - ✓ Private schools and daycares should ask their legal council if/how this legislation applies to their programs.
- e. Schools may require masks when:
 - ✓ A child returns to school rather than quarantining at home after an exposure and is a) not up to date or b) has not tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 6 months, or
 - ✓ A child returns to school on Days 6-10 of isolation.
- f. The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) standards for masking may apply to school and daycare **employees**. Review the agency's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page for more information.
- g. Masking Outdoors: In general, masks do not need to be worn outside. However, in crowded settings or places where children play in close quarters with one another, students, attendees, and staff may wear masks outside for added protection.
- h. Refer to the [COVID-19: Protect Yourself & Others](#) page for mask requirements in Alexandria City buildings.
- i. Please see [VDOE](#) guidelines for additional guidance regarding masking in daycares and schools.

3. Physical Distancing

- a. Follow CDC guidance for physical distancing depending on the [COVID-19 Community Level](#) in Alexandria City to promote in-person instruction.
- b. Cohorting or podding can be used to limit the number of people exposed to COVID-19 at any one time.
 - ✓ Consider grouping desks in pods of 3-5 students.
 - ✓ Staff should only work with one cohort rather than floating between multiple cohorts.
 - ✓ Avoid blending cohorts during recess/lunchtime.
 - ✓ If unable to space children 6 feet apart during naptime or other times when masks cannot be worn, use cohorting.
 - ✓ Prioritize spacing for those who have had a recent exposure to COVID-19, but are present in class.
 - ✓ Children should stay in their assigned cohort when eating in a communal setting.
- c. Staggered meal times, snack times, naps, and curbside pick-up/drop-off of students can help facilitate adequate distancing.
- d. For breastfeeding parents and guardians, provide distanced spaces of at least 6 feet apart from others to allow for safe infant nursing.

4. Screening Testing and Test to Stay

- a. Schools and daycares should consider implementing screening testing programs to minimize additional exposures at school. The CDC has developed:
 - ✓ [Recommendations for K-12 schools.](#)
 - ✓ [Recommendations for early child care programs.](#)
- b. Virginia School Screening Testing for Assurance ([ViSSTA](#)) may provide testing vendors, supplies, and staffing to support **end-to-end** COVID-19 testing in K-12 schools.
 - ✓ Additional information about screening testing is available on the [VDH](#) and [CDC](#) websites.
- c. Most K-12 schools and daycares are eligible for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) testing program, [Operation Expanded Testing](#).
- d. [Increasing Community Access to Testing \(ICATT\)](#) funds testing in K-12 schools in high need areas. ICATT does not fund testing in daycares at this time.
- e. Visit [Alexandria: COVID-19: Get Tested](#) for additional testing opportunities in Alexandria (e.g., [United States Postal Service](#), [Alexandria Libraries](#)).
- f. **Test to Stay:** Schools and daycares may implement a [Test to Stay](#) protocol, which offers students who are identified as close contacts an alternative to traditional quarantine. Please check [VDH's testing page](#) for updates. Consider access to tests and exposure risk before implementation.
 - ✓ Test to Stay allows close contacts who are able to mask around others to remain in class on Days 1-5 following an exposure if they participate in **daily antigen testing**.

5. Ventilation

- a. Improve [ventilation](#) to reduce the amount of virus particles that may circulate through a facility. Please review the [CDC's recommendations for ventilation](#) and [Interactive School Ventilation Tool](#) to learn more about how to reduce levels of virus particles throughout the day. Also consider:
 - ✓ Moving activities outside as much as possible.
 - ✓ Checking with your HVAC system servicer about A/C performance when windows are also open for improved ventilation.
 - ✓ Using portable air cleaners with HEPA filters when available.
 - ✓ Opening bus windows so long as doing so does not pose a safety risk.
- b. Consider running your HVAC system at maximum outside airflow for 2 hours before and after the building is occupied.

6. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

- a. Schools should monitor and encourage hand washing and [respiratory etiquette](#) and provide adequate hand washing supplies.
 - ✓ Wash for **at least 20 seconds** with soap and warm water and use a paper towel to dry hands and turn off the sink faucet.
- b. Staff should keep hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) close by at all times.
 - ✓ Pro tip: 70% alcohol sanitizer can also prevent the spread of norovirus (stomach flu).

7. Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested

- a. Regularly screen students and staff for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) and exposures to COVID-19 before class.
- b. Educate teachers, staff, and families about when to [isolate and when to quarantine](#).
- c. Anyone waiting for a COVID-19 test result should stay away from others.

- ✓ Individuals who are antigen negative but have pending PCR tests should not return to school.
- d. Share VDH's [COVID-19 Parent Flowchart](#) (Appendix C) with parents and staff.
 - ✓ Students and staff should get tested right away if they develop **any** symptoms, even if they think it is "just a cold" or "just allergies."
 - ✓ Symptomatic individuals who have a **negative** rapid antigen test should have a confirmatory PCR test collected the same day.

8. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

- a. Schools and daycares should identify [close contacts](#) following an exposure and report COVID-19 **outbreaks** to AHD.
 - ✓ Prioritize exposures that have occurred in the past 5 days.
 - ✓ Prioritize groups where the virus is most easily spread.
 - ✓ Prioritize high risk exposures.
- b. Schools and daycares may follow [VDH](#) isolation and quarantine guidance for the general public. For more detailed information, review Appendix D. Note: [CDC recommendations](#) may differ.
- c. Schools/daycares should decide on vaccination/booster requirements for students.
 - ✓ To allow time for students to catch up with booster recommendations and to minimize disruption to in-person learning, students ages 5-11 years who completed their primary vaccine series but have not yet received all eligible boosters may forgo quarantine. If your school allows students who are fully vaccinated but not yet boosted to forgo quarantine, please see Appendix D, **Table 2a** for details.
 - ✓ If your school chooses to **require all students to be up to date** on all doses in order to forgo quarantine, please see Appendix D, **Table 2b** for details.

9. Cleaning and Disinfection

- a. If no one with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 has been in a space within the last 24 hours, [routine cleaning should be sufficient](#).
- b. Review the [CDC's guidance to know when to clean and when to disinfect](#).

II. Create a Plan for Identifying COVID-19 Cases, Contact Tracing, and Notifying Families

AHD encourages schools and daycares to identify COVID-19 cases, conduct contact tracing, and notify families and staff of potential exposures.

1. **Designate a COVID-19 liaison** who will be responsible for gathering information, communicating with AHD, and notifying families of exposures at school.
 - a. Your COVID-19 liaison should maintain contact information for staff and students and be available after hours and on weekends.
2. **Require guardians and staff to report if they/their child are identified as a COVID-19 case** or exposed to someone with COVID-19.
 - a. Create a reporting line, online form/portal, or shared inbox for families to report COVID-19 cases or exposures 7 days a week.
 - b. We recommend collecting the following information when parents report that their child has COVID-19:
 - ✓ Name
 - ✓ DOB
 - ✓ Date the positive COVID-19 test was **collected**
 - ✓ Type of COVID-19 test (PCR or Antigen)
 - ✓ Location of test (e.g., Home, Curative, Doctor's office)
 - ✓ Does your child have any symptoms? If yes, what day did symptoms begin?
 - ✓ Did your child have a known exposure to COVID-19? If yes, please describe the exposure (e.g., a friend at school, a family member at home, a friend at soccer).
3. **Create seating charts**, classroom rosters, and bus lists with each student's name and contact information for their parents/guardians, especially for grades PreK-5. In order to do effective contact tracing, each school should keep **an electronic list** of students and their contact information (phone numbers & email).
 - a. AHD strongly recommends developing classroom lists ahead of time.
 - b. Secondary schools can create numbered zones or QR codes for students to scan when they arrive at a specific location or group of tables.
 - c. If schools are not able to identify who was in close contact with the individual with COVID-19, they should consider the entire group (e.g., classroom or sports team) close contacts.
4. **Share your school's plan** for identifying COVID-19 cases and contact tracing with families.
 - a. Share the general notification letter with families and explain what it means to receive that letter. Make sure families understand the difference between a General Notification Letter (Appendix A) and a letter indicating that their child was identified as a close contact (Appendix G).
 - b. Let families know if classes may be "paused" or closed temporarily to allow for contact tracing.
5. **Consider hosting a town hall** with AHD to educate families and answer any questions they may have about COVID-19.

III. Questions to Consider When Developing or Revising

COVID-19 Policies

Schools and daycares should develop COVID-19 policies and share their policies with families and staff. If policies are updated, make sure to let your staff and families know.

Here are some questions to consider when drafting COVID-19 policies:

1. Will your school/daycare require proof of vaccination for eligible students/attendees and staff?
2. Will your school participate in weekly screening tests?
3. Will students in isolation and/or quarantine have a virtual learning option?
 - a. How will students who need to isolate or quarantine access resources (e.g., tech support, computers, webcams, school supplies, and school meals)?
4. What will your return-to-school criteria look like for students and staff with symptoms of COVID-19?
 - a. Will students and staff who report symptoms be required to have a negative COVID-19 test or a doctor's note before returning to school?
 - b. Will home tests be accepted?
5. What will your return to school criteria look like for students and staff who are exposed to COVID-19?
 - a. Will you require testing?
 - b. Will home tests be accepted?
6. Will you implement a Test to Stay protocol?
7. How will parents/caregivers report COVID-19 test results?
8. What is your school/daycare community's risk tolerance?
 - a. Does your community want to go with the most cautious guidelines?
 - b. Does your community want to be more flexible with the guidelines?
9. Do the emotional, social, and mental health of children and staff needs fit into the overall strategy for return to school/daycare after isolation and or quarantine?

IV. Know What to do When a COVID-19 Case is Identified at Your School

1. If a staff member reports that they have COVID-19, or a guardian reports that their child has COVID-19, the person who is ill should stay home and isolate themselves from others. If a student or staff member develops any [symptoms of COVID-19](#) while at school, immediately isolate them from others and send them home as soon as possible. See Appendix D for more details.
 - a. Encourage symptomatic individuals to [get tested for COVID-19 right away](#) if they have not yet done so.
1. Determine if the individual attended school while infectious.
 - a. An individual with COVID-19 is infectious beginning **two days before** their symptom onset or the date of their positive test (if asymptomatic).
 - b. Identify [close contacts](#).
 - ✓ **Exception:** In the K-12 structured classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infectious student) if **both** the infectious student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.
 - This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults.
2. Notify families and staff that an exposure occurred at school using AHD's

general notification template letter (Appendix A).

- a. Families and staff should be notified of an exposure at the school **within 24 hours** of the exposure being reported to the school. The letter should include the date(s) the case was at school while infectious.
3. When reaching out to cases and close contacts, direct them to public health guidance, connect families to resources, let them know [when it is safe to be around others](#), and when to get tested.
 - a. Schools may “pause” or temporarily close classroom(s) to allow time for contact tracers to provide guidance to all exposed individuals.
 - b. Schools *may* still report single cases to AHD using the [COVID-19 School/Daycare/Youth Sports Case Reporting Form](#). This is **not required**.
4. Monitor close contacts for 10 days following an exposure to identify any additional cases or outbreaks.
 - a. Close contacts can “convert” to COVID-19 cases in one of two ways:
 - ✓ (1) **They test positive for COVID-19**, OR
 - ✓ (2) They develop **symptoms** during their 10-day monitoring period.
 - And they do not get a negative PCR COVID-19 test within 4 days of their symptom onset.
 - ✓ Note: It is not required to have a positive COVID-19 test in order to be considered a COVID-19 case; a link to a known case and specific symptoms may meet the [CDC’s criteria for a COVID-19 case](#).
 - b. When a close contact of an *outbreak* converts to a COVID-19 case, please notify AHD.
5. Report identified outbreaks to AHD.
 - a. [Figure 1](#) diagrams the outbreak reporting process for a COVID-19 case at school/daycare. Use AHD’s [COVID-19 Outbreak Reporting Form](#) to report outbreaks to AHD. Please see Appendix H for detailed instructions on how to identify and report an outbreak.
 - b. Outbreaks are published on the public [VDH Outbreak Dashboard](#).

V. Know How to Identify and Report COVID-19 Outbreaks to AHD

Pursuant to Section [32.1-37](#) of the *Code of Virginia*, schools, services or facilities licensed or operated by an agency of the Commonwealth, and summer camps as defined in Section 35.1 -1 are **required to report** disease [outbreaks](#) to their local health department. Schools and daycares should create a plan to report COVID-19 outbreaks to AHD. Please see Appendix H for detailed instructions on how to identify and report an outbreak.

“School” is defined as: any public school from K-12 operated under the authority of any locality within the Commonwealth, any private or religious school that offers instruction at any level or grade from K-12, and any private or religious nursery school or preschool, or any private or religious child care center required to be licensed by the Commonwealth.

Examples of facilities licensed by an agency of the Commonwealth include: any school or daycare facility licensed by VDOE.

Facilities not licensed by the state or not covered by the definition of “school” are still encouraged to **voluntarily report** outbreaks to VDH, and staff should investigate such outbreaks when they are reported.

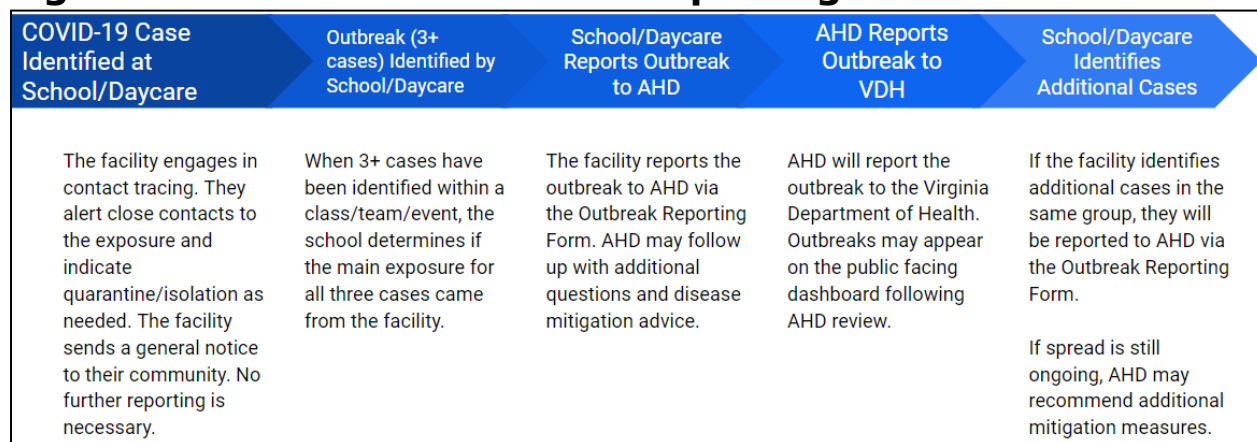
Effective January 1, 2022, an outbreak is classified as **three or more COVID-19 cases** within 14 days, who are epidemiologically linked, do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing. Schools and daycares should also report any clusters of cases comprising greater than 10% of an exposure group (e.g., grade, classroom, school bus route, staff members, or the entire school/daycare population).

1. **Identify a COVID-19 outbreak.** Please review Appendix H for detailed instructions.
2. **Notify AHD of a COVID-19 outbreak** by submitting a [COVID-19 Outbreak Reporting Form](#) online. Please call the AHD COVID-19 School Reporting Line with any questions regarding the online submission. The reporting line is for **administrators only. Please do not share the COVID-19 School Reporting Line with families.** Email alex_schoolteam@vdh.virginia.gov if you need the number.
 - a. The reporting line's normal operating hours are from 8:30 am - 4:30 pm Monday through Friday.
 - b. To assist with outbreak investigations, your COVID-19 liaison may be asked to provide AHD with classroom rosters, list of cases, bus lists, and seating charts.

In response to an outbreak report, AHD may gather information such as enrollment, current staffing levels, the number of cases, symptoms and dates of illness, locations of illness within the facility, and the number of close contacts resulting from an exposure. AHD may conduct a site visit, arrange public health testing events, review prevention methods, and report outbreaks to the VDH.

In addition, schools and daycares should contact AHD if they have clusters of other illnesses that are unrelated to COVID-19 (e.g., respiratory infections, stomach flus, and rashes). AHD can help with mitigation measures against illnesses such as norovirus, hand, foot and mouth disease, and influenza in addition to COVID-19. AHD should also be alerted to any clusters of **severe** illness among staff, attendees, or families that **require hospitalization**.

Figure 1: COVID-19 Outbreak Reporting Process



VI. Considerations for Youth Sports, Band, & Chorus

While sports, music, and other extracurricular activities are important components of youth development, school administrators should continue to prioritize in-person learning. For guidance regarding CDC's recommended prevention strategies, refer to the CDC's page on [COVID-19 Community Level](#).

1. [Guidance for youth sports](#)

- a. Maximize physical distancing during practices and pre-season training to prevent exposures that may affect competition.
- b. Cohort athletes during practice to minimize the number of athletes that may need to quarantine if someone attends while infectious.
- c. Consider wearing a mask while playing indoor sports, especially any sport that involves close contact. Masks are not required when exercising, but may be worn when engaging in active sports play. Spectators may consider wearing a mask especially when COVID-19 Community Level is high.
- d. Consider screening testing for athletes and coaches.
- e. Discourage athletes from participating in high risk activities outside of practice and competition. Dinners and social gatherings can jeopardize a team's season, especially if someone attends these events while infectious.
- f. Encourage athletes to adhere to regular carpool groups to minimize exposure.

2. **Guidance for band and chorus**

- a. Maximize physical distancing when playing wind instruments and when singing.
- b. Cohort students to minimize the number of band or chorus members that may need to quarantine if someone attends while infectious.
- c. Consider screening testing for band or chorus members.
- d. Move practices outside or to well-ventilated indoor spaces, if possible.

VIII. Appendices

- A. **Template General Notification:** Template letter to be used as a notification to an entire school population following a general exposure at school for both close contacts and other staff and attendees.
- B. VDH Decision Matrix for Evaluating Symptoms (Removed)
- C. **VDH COVID-19 Parent Flowchart:** One-page tool to be used by parents for how to determine what actions to take following an exposure to COVID-19.
- D. **Isolation and Quarantine Guidance for Daycares and Schools:** Information in table format regarding best practices for isolation and quarantine in daycare and school settings.
- E. **Frequently Asked Questions:** Frequent questions that AHD has received from parents and administrators.
- F. **Continuous Household Exposure Scenario:** A visual aid for a common question we receive listed in Appendix E, Question 9 regarding continuous at-home exposure to someone with COVID-19. This is relevant for families with unvaccinated children and those that cannot wear a mask.
- G. **K-12 School/Daycare Close Contact Template Letter:** Template letter to be used to notify persons when they have been identified as close contacts due to a daycare or school exposure to COVID-19.
 - a. Appendix G.1: **K-12 School/Daycare Close Contact Template Letter - with a Test to Stay Option:** Template letter to be used to notify persons when they have been identified as close contacts due to a daycare or school

- exposure to COVID-19. Letter includes considerations for Test to Stay.
- H. **How to Identify and Report an Outbreak of COVID-19:** Set of directions for administrators on how to report an outbreak of 3 or more cases of COVID-19 to AHD, and what response to expect.
 - I. **Line List Templates:** Electronic and printable templates for line lists to be used by school and daycare administrators to help them determine whether they have an outbreak of COVID-19. In the event of an outbreak, AHD may request copies of these files.
 - J. **Quarantine Calculator:** Tool to aid administrators in calculating quarantine schedules and dates according to the last date of exposure. A link is included to an [isolation and quarantine calculator](#) created by VDH.
 - K. **Test to Stay Summary:** A one-page summary of the Test to Stay (TTS) program as applied in daycare settings as well as a sample TTS test results log.
 - a. Appendix K.1: A [Spanish translation](#) of this one-page summary.
 - L. **Template Outbreak Notice to Families:** Template letter to alert families of an outbreak affecting their school/daycare, which indicates additional steps individuals can take to prevent further viral spread.

IX. Additional Resources

General Guidance

1. [VDH: Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Virginia PreK-12 Schools](#)
2. [VDH: K-12 Education](#)
3. [CDC: Quarantine and Isolation](#)
4. [VDH: Isolation and Quarantine Calculator](#)
5. [CDC: Quarantine and Isolation Calculator](#)
6. [VDH: What to do if you were potentially exposed to coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)?](#)
7. [VDH: What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)?](#)
8. [AAP: Guidance for Safe Schools](#)
9. [CDC: Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#)
10. [DOE: Protecting Student Privacy FERPA and COVID-19](#)
11. [VDH COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Child Care Facility Collaboration with the Local Health Department](#)
12. [NACCHO: Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Early Care and Education/ Child Care Programs, Section 7: Staff Resilience and Support](#)
13. [Steps for Determining Close Contact and Quarantine in K-12 Schools](#)
14. [Isolation and Quarantine in Early Care and Education \(ECE\) Programs](#)

Ventilation

15. [CDC: Ventilation in Buildings](#)
16. [ASHRAE Epidemic Task Force: Schools and Universities](#)

Sports and Physical Activities

17. [VDH: Considerations for Recreational Sports](#)
18. [AAP: Sports and Physical Activities Guidance](#)

Resources for Parents

19. [CDC: Frequently Asked Questions for K-12 and Early Care and Education \(ECE\)](#)

[Settings: Information for School and ECE Administrators, Teachers, Staff, and Parents](#)

20. [K-12 COVID-19 Parent Flowchart](#)

Print Resources

21. [Important Steps to Choosing a Mask](#)