

School Reporting of a Positive or Suspected COVID-19 Student or Employee

Current Missouri law requires a school to “report to the local health authority or the Department of Health and Senior Services the presence or suspected presence of” COVID-19. 19 CSR 20-20.020(8).

A Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) [Order](#) issued on August 7th, requires the local public health authority (LPHA) to begin contact tracing of all COVID-19 positive individuals between the age of 3 and 21, as soon as possible. Further, the Order requires the LPHA to prioritize notifying the COVID-19 school point of contact for the individual, so that the school may understand the presence of COVID-19 among its students and staff, as well as assist the LPHA with expedited contact tracing.

These provisions of law are designed to immediately alert a school of a positive individual in order to quickly respond to a COVID-19 case, with the intent of preventing additional cases and exposures at the school. In some circumstances, school may learn of a COVID-19 case prior to the LPHA or DHSS, and schools are directed to communicate this information to the LPHA.

When should the school alert the LPHA of a COVID-19 case?

- When the school is made aware of a positive test result or a medical provider based diagnosis from the individual, the individual’s parent or guardian, or the individual’s medical provider.
- When the school is made aware of or identifies an individual as “suspected” of having COVID-19. An example can include, but is not limited to, a contact to a known case who is reported to the school as having developing symptoms compatible with COVID-19.

Why is it important for the school to report a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 Case to the LPHA, shouldn’t the LPHA be informing the school?

During instances in which the school is alerted of an individual testing positive for COVID-19 by a parent or guardian before the LPHA receives a report of the case, the school should report to the Local Public Health Agency. In these instances, the school may have already gained knowledge before the health authority can determine if and where the individual attends school. Without the assistance and reporting from the school, unnecessary exposure of individuals could occur. There are many reasons why the school may be notified of a COVID-19 case prior to DHSS and the LPHA including, but not limited to:

- The first reports of a case received by DHSS and the LPHA usually does not include information regarding the individual’s school attendance. This information is typically obtained by the LPHA during the case investigation.
- In some cases the positive individual or their parent or guardian may not cooperate with the LPHA, but may inform the school.

How should the process work when an individual between the ages of 3-21 tests positive for COVID-19:

- The laboratory that runs the test reports the positive test result to: (1) the medical provider that ordered the test and; (2) DHSS.
- The medical provider alerts their patient of the result.
 - *Once this has occurred, if the individual is COVID-19 positive, at any point during the following process, the individual or their parent or guardian may alert the school of the positive COVID-19 test result.*
 - *The school will alert the LPHA of the positive COVID-19 test result and shorten the time it takes to assist the school.*
- DHSS notifies the LPHA within 2 hours of a positive COVID-19 test result.
- Because the positive individual is between the ages of 3-21, the LPHA:
 - Initiates the case investigation to identify risk factors including school attendance.
 - Prioritizes alerting the school's COVID-19 point of contact.
 - Immediately begins contact tracing.
 - Works with the school to appropriately respond to a case of COVID-19 in a school setting.
- If the LPHA learns of close contacts, the LPHA will communicate to the close contacts with instructions for implementing appropriate control measures.

Should a school shut down the classroom/building/campus/district that the COVID-19 positive individual was present in prior to their positive COVID-19 test result?

- Ideally, the school should work with the LPHA to determine the extent of the COVID-19 exposure, number of COVID-19 positive individuals that have been physically present in the classroom/building/campus/district, when such individuals were exposed, the need for environmental cleaning, and all other relevant factors. The closing of a classroom/building/campus/district should be the last resort after all other science based responses have failed to contain the COVID-19 situation. In addition to the authority of a school to close a facility, the LPHA also has the power to close a facility when necessary to protect public health.
- In the event that an LPHA determines case specific circumstances warrant further action, schools should have in place adequate plans for short-term building or classroom closure procedures consistent with CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting. The objective in these limited circumstances should include closing off areas used by the COVID-19 positive person to others, opening outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area, and if necessary waiting up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection. However, any decision to close off an area should be done in consultation with the LPHA.

Should a school notify DHSS of a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 Case?

- No. Notifying the local public health authority meets the necessary regulatory requirements placed on a school. However, schools are encouraged to open lines of communication with students and parents, as well as staff, to encourage reporting positive test results with the LPHA or school administration so as to expedite information sharing to mitigate community transmission.