# Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and Department of Public Health
## Frequently Asked Questions, Week of October 12, 2021

1. **Can individuals who are unable to wear a mask due to medical or behavioral issues participate in Test and Stay?**

   Yes, provided that staff supporting such students employ the additional safety precautions described below (Appendix A).

2. **When individuals are participating in the Test and Stay program, do they have to wear masks when outdoors?**

   Yes. Individuals who are in the Test and Stay program must wear masks at all times, unless they are eating or drinking, including when outdoors.

3. **For the Test and Stay program, is there a specific time of day that the tests need to occur?**

   Schools are encouraged to conduct Test and Stay testing the first day of the school week and as early in the day as possible, but there is not a specific deadline for testing. On Tuesday through Friday, there is a not a recommended testing time, as long as individuals in the program are tested daily.

4. **If a provider clears a symptomatic individual to return to school <u>due to an alternative diagnosis</u>, can they return to school without a PCR test?**

   Yes. As outlined in Protocol C-1 of the [Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios in SY 2021-22](#), individuals may return to school after having COVID-19-like symptoms so long as the individual is not a close contact and a medical professional makes an alternative diagnosis for the COVID-19-like symptoms, after they have improvement and symptoms and have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.

   <u>**If an individual has received an alternative diagnosis for the COVID-19-like symptoms (e.g., allergies) from a medical professional, then a negative PCR test is not needed to return to school as long as the individual is not a close contact.**</u>

5. **Is the Test and Stay program available to both students and staff?**

   Yes. Both students and staff may participate in the Test and Stay program.

6. **When can at-home, over the counter tests be used as part of the Protocols for Responding to COVID-19?**

   At-home, over the counter tests **can be used to positively identify an individual who has**

**COVID-19, whether or not the administration of the over the counter test is supervised by a medical professional.** It is recommended that an at-home positive test be followed by a PCR test, but an individual should follow Protocol A if they test positive through an at-home, over the counter test.

If someone is testing to exit quarantine after being identified as a close contact, **they can only use an official test.** An official test is a PCR or antigen test that is done at a lab, a health care facility, or a proctored (observed online) home test whose results are automatically and electronically reported to public health.

7. **As the weather grows colder, how should districts communicate with families about ventilation on buses?**

   Schools are strongly encouraged to keep bus windows open whenever feasible to increase ventilation on buses. DESE encourages districts to communicate with their school community that increasing outside air will affect the temperatures on buses. Districts should encourage families and caregivers to send their students to school with plenty of warm layers in fall and winter, as bus temperatures could fluctuate throughout the day.

8. The [Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios](#) refers to mild symptoms. What symptoms are considered mild?

   **Mild symptoms:** This refers to any **single** (isolated) symptom on the list below if the symptom is also mild. If a symptom is **severe** (based on the clinical judgement of school health professionals), even if isolated, then it should **not** be considered a mild symptom.

   - Cough
   - Sore throat
   - Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
   - Headache
   - Fatigue
   - Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies)

**Appendix A**

**Additional Precautions for Staff Supporting Students Who Cannot Wear Masks**

Some students cannot wear masks for medical or behavioral reasons and, like any other students, they might be identified as close contacts who can participate in Test and Stay. When this happens, the staff members who interact with such students should follow the guidelines that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes for "direct service providers". Direct service providers include educators, personal care attendants, paraprofessionals, therapists, related services personnel, assistants, school nurses, health office staff, and any other staff who must interact closely with students who cannot wear masks while participating in Test and Stay.

Direct service providers are essential for the health and well-being of the students they serve. Direct service providers should be aware of and trained on how COVID-19 spreads, risk factors, and prevention actions. Additional preventive measures may need to be taken depending on the activity and the risk level of that activity. Below, please find additional information on the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for direct service providers:

| Classification of Individual Wearing protective equipment | N95 or KN95 Respirator | Face Shield | Disposable Gowns | Disposable Gloves | Gowns/ Coveralls/ Other Body Covering | Cloth Face Covering | Disposable mask |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DSPs in care areas of students who cannot wear masks and are identified as close contacts | X | X | X | X | X | | X<br><br>(with face shield if N95/KN95 not available) |
| DSPs in the same facility but not in the care areas for students who cannot wear masks and are identified as close contacts | | | | | | X | |
| DSPs providing personal care to students without suspected COVID-19 but who may potentially be exposed to bodily fluids | | X (preferred) | | X | | | X |
| DSPs performing or present during aerosol generating procedures such as nebulizer treatments, chest PT, suctioning, trach care | X | X | | X | X | | |
| Transportation personnel/monitors who must come in direct physical contact with passengers (e.g. buckling/unbuckling, performing wheelchair safety services) | | | | X | | X | |