
Benefits of COVID-19 Testing in Schools

Testing in schools reduces transmission and allows schools to operate safely.

- Testing symptomatic individuals, and close contacts, helps to ensure quick identification and isolation of cases. Also, contact tracing can be completed quickly. This can reduce or prevent school outbreaks.
- Screening testing is important in identifying asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic cases quickly to prevent virus transmission within the school community.
- Rapid Point of Care (POC) testing can reduce the impact on students in regards to missing in-person learning.
- Testing also protects unvaccinated students and staff. This is very important as children under the age of 12 are not yet able to get vaccinated. In addition, some older children may not have received parental consent to receive the vaccine and some students and staff may not be able to receive the vaccination due to medical reasons.
- Testing also provides extra protection for schools that are not able to provide the optimal physical distance between students and staff.
- Testing allows students to safely participate in classes, extracurricular activities, and sports.
- Testing allows schools to monitor, evaluate and modify prevention strategies as needed.
- While children are less likely to develop severe COVID-19 disease than adults, one-third of all children with COVID-19 infection develop “long COVID”. Children who experience this complication can develop a variety of multi-organ effects including heart, brain, lung, kidney, and skin issues. Extreme fatigue and psychological issues may also result. These effects may delay a child’s return to school and/or impede their educational success. Testing can protect more children from “long COVID”.

Testing in schools is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Please see Table 1 on page 2.

- Per the new CDC and IDPH school guidance dated July 9, 2021 and updated July 27, 2021, screening testing should be offered to unvaccinated students when community transmission is moderate, substantial, or high. Screening testing should be offered to all unvaccinated teachers and staff regardless of community transmission.
- Kane County is currently experiencing moderate transmission. However, the number of Delta variant cases is rising in Illinois which may result in increased transmission rates in Kane County. The Delta variant is known to be highly transmissible.
- Currently, only 52.8% of Kane County residents ages 12 and older are fully vaccinated. Therefore, nearly half the population of Kane County residents ages 12 and older are susceptible to becoming infected and transmitting the virus. Testing in schools will help to prevent further infection.

Testing can help to prevent an adaptive pause or school closure.

- Preventing an adaptive pause or school closure is especially important in protecting vulnerable and under-resourced students and their families. These children may lack the technology, parental guidance or support, or a safe environment to succeed in schooling during an adaptive pause or school closure.
- When schools remain open, it also reduces the complexity of providing equitable educational services to students who have an IEP or 504 educational plan.
- Schools implementing screening testing may opt to implement a Test-to-Stay Strategy to permit classroom exposed students to remain in-person.

Testing in schools provides equitable access

- Schools working with SHEILD Illinois are able to receive support with screening testing for free with PCR and Antigen tests.
- Testing at schools provides the school community with easy access to testing in a trusted environment.
- Families who lack access to transportation or paid time off from work can ensure their children have equitable access to testing.
- ISBE’s mission states the goal is to “provide each and every child with safe and healthy learning conditions” while ISBE’s equity statement states “Illinois has an urgent and collective responsibility to achieve educational equity by ensuring that all policies, programs, and practices affirm the strengths that each and every child brings within their diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and by delivering the comprehensive supports, programs, and educational opportunities they need to succeed”. Testing in schools is in full support of these statements.

Testing can help to yield community confidence in a school district’s ability to provide a healthy and safe learning environment.

- Providing regular testing for unvaccinated staff and students can reduce anxiety, build trust and ease safety concerns, especially among medically vulnerable students, staff and families.

Table 1. Screening Testing Recommendations for K-12 Schools by Level of Community Transmission

	Low Transmission ¹ Blue	Moderate Transmission Yellow	Substantial Transmission Orange	High Transmission Red
Students	Do not need to screen students.	Offer screening testing for students who are not fully vaccinated at least once per week.		
Teachers and staff	Offer screening testing for teachers and staff who are not fully vaccinated at least once per week.			
High risk sports and activities	Recommend screening testing for high-risk sports² and extracurricular activities³ at least once per week for participants who are not fully vaccinated.	Recommend screening testing for high-risk sports and extracurricular activities twice per week for participants who are not fully vaccinated.	Cancel or hold high-risk sports and extracurricular activities virtually to protect in-person learning, unless all participants are fully vaccinated.	
Low- and intermediate-risk sports	Do not need to screen students participating in low- and intermediate-risk sports. ²	Recommend screening testing for low- and intermediate-risk sports at least once per week for participants who are not fully vaccinated.		

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