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School COVID-19 Testing Programs Overview

Background

This document is intended to supplement and expand upon the COVID-19 Response Testing Programs for Vermont Schools, Fall-Winter 2021 memo released on October 1, 2021. In response to a rapidly shifting COVID-19 context and the impact of the Delta variant, the State of Vermont is introducing several additional COVID-19 testing programs designed to support safe, in-person learning in Vermont schools during the 2021-22 school year. The goals of these programs are to ensure that students and staff can safely participate in in-person learning. These testing options also aim to lessen the burdens of contact tracing on school systems and reduce the impacts of widespread quarantine on students, their families and schools.

By introducing new testing options, the state intends to provide schools with a testing "toolkit" whose use can be determined by local COVID-19 conditions and available resources. Not every school will need to use every tool.

Testing Tools

To help schools frame their thinking about these tools the COVID-19 School Testing Program is divided into two broad categories: response and surveillance testing. Response testing is just that, the use of either antigen or PCR testing done in *response* to a positive COVID-19 case within the school community. Surveillance testing is periodic testing (usually once a week) whose goal is to monitor for the presence of COVID-19, and potentially to facilitate the safe continuation of extracurricular activities.

The Agency of Education has created a series of tools and resources that are available on the School COVID-19 Testing Resources for School Staff website, including a graphic organizer summarizing the information below.

Response Testing

Response testing includes both rapid antigen testing and PCR testing. These tools should be used in response to a positive case within the school community. They are intended for close contacts and the use case for each test type is determined primarily by the vaccination status of the close contact.

It is important to note that any symptomatic individuals, regardless of vaccination status, should not be on the school campus. In addition to COVID-19, schools need to guard against other respiratory viruses and influenza.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information please contact the AOE COVID-19 Response Team at aoe.covid19testing@vermont.gov.

Test Type 1: "Test to Stay" Antigen Testing

When a student or staff member with COVID-19 is present in school during their infectious period, the school may implement Test to Stay for unvaccinated close contacts.

Who can participate?

- Unvaccinated, asymptomatic students (ages 5 and up) and staff who are close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case.

When should we use Test to Stay?

When a student or staff member with COVID-19 is present in school during their infectious period, the school may implement Test to Stay for unvaccinated close contacts. When a case is identified during the school day, the following should occur:

1. The school should conduct contact tracing to identify close contacts.
2. Unvaccinated students and staff who are close contacts should finish the school day as normal.
3. The following day, unvaccinated close contacts that do not participate in Test to Stay must quarantine (stay home from school). Unvaccinated close contacts who participate in Test to Stay will come to school as normal, but must be tested ***before*** beginning the school day.
    a. Schools may house students in a designated area, where they will not mix with students and staff who are not testing until they have their results.
    b. Students may ride the bus to school, but must remain masked at all times, per federal regulations. If a student receives a positive antigen test, it will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian to pick the student up from school. The student will not be permitted to ride the bus home, as they are now considered a positive COVID-19 case.
4. Close contacts will receive an antigen test until 7 days have elapsed from the date of last exposure to the case.
5. While students and staff are participating in Test to Stay antigen testing they should quarantine while outside of school, including over the weekend.

Siblings of positive cases should not participate in Test to Stay and should follow Health Department guidance for quarantine.

How does it work?

The above outlined procedure applies to the following scenarios for students and staff with COVID-19 symptoms.

Scenario 1 – Individual is symptomatic, antigen test negative

When a student or staff member is symptomatic, they will get an antigen test. If the antigen test comes back *negative*:

- The individual should still be sent home and receive a confirmatory in-school response PCR test (see test type 2) before they leave school. If an in-school test in unavailable, the school may provide a Take Home PCR Test, (see test type 3) to be self-administered at home and either mailed that same day to the lab via UPS or other courier service, or returned to the school for shipping.
- Close contacts do not need to be identified yet, and other students and staff members will continue their day as normal.
- If the symptomatic individual's PCR test comes back positive, the school commences a Test to Stay Program for unvaccinated close contacts who choose to participate until 7 days have elapsed from the date of last exposure.
- If the PCR test comes back negative, no antigen testing is necessary.

Scenario 2- Individual is symptomatic, antigen test positive

When a student or staff member is symptomatic, they will get an antigen test. If the antigen test comes back *positive*:

- The individual should be sent home and go into isolation for 10 days.
- Test to Stay should start for unvaccinated close contacts the next day.
- Antigen testing should continue for 7 days since the date of last exposure.

Scenario 3 – Procedures upon learning of a positive PCR result

When a student or staff member receives a positive PCR test result, regardless of whether they are symptomatic or not:

- The individual should be sent home (or not come to school) and go into isolation for 10 days.
- Test to Stay should start for unvaccinated close contacts as early as possible, but no later than the next day.
- Antigen testing should continue for 7 days since the date of last exposure.

How are results reported?

- Schools will be using SimpleReport for all rapid antigen tests. It can accommodate all antigen test types and links directly to the Vermont Department of Health so that test results do not need to be reported separately.
- SimpleReport is a free web tool created by the CDC that helps make COVID-19 rapid testing and reporting easier for schools.
- More information about the registration process is available in the Test to Stay Onboarding Checklist. Please use this guide to register and onboard.
- Please note that there is an option to do a bulk upload of participant data, rather than asking families to preregister.
- This reporting tool includes the option for test results to be sent in real time via text or email to parents/guardians.

Test Type

- Rapid antigen tests. Both Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) and non-CLIA waivered test kits may be available depending on the supply chain.
- Test kits are nasal swabs, which can be self-administered by individuals ages 15 and up. An adult must collect the swab for students ages 5 through 14.

Recommended Use Cases:

- In elementary schools: classrooms and any additional close contacts in school.
- In middle and high schools with less than 80% of the eligible population vaccinated, contract tracing should be done first to determine close contacts:
    - If the close contact is vaccinated, then they would not participate in TTS and will not be required to quarantine. Instead, it is recommended that they complete a PCR test 3-5 days after their exposure.
    - If the close contact is unvaccinated *and* asymptomatic, then they can participate in TTS or opt out and follow the protocols for quarantine either with or without a PCR test on day 7.
- Not recommended for middle and high schools where more than 80% of the eligible population is vaccinated.

Test Type 2: In-School PCR Response Test

In addition to antigen tests for use in the Test to Stay program, schools can also make use of PCR kits provided by CIC (also known as "white label" kits) to provide in school, on demand PCR tests. These PCR white label kits are the same kits used in Surveillance Testing and utilizes the same Binx registration system as well. In effect, a school can have one supply of white label kits on hand for either purpose; on demand PCR tests or surveillance tests.

In school, on demand PCR tests can meet a variety of needs, including testing students out of quarantine, testing close contacts of a positive case, or as a confirmatory test for a symptomatic person that has a negative antigen test.

Who can participate?

- Students (ages 5 and up) and staff, regardless of vaccination status.
- Symptomatic (if testing in school prior to sending symptomatic person home) or asymptomatic close contacts.
- Schools may administer the tests to individual students and staff, to groups of students, or to the entire school or multiple classrooms, grade levels as necessary/applicable.
- Limited to those within the school community because the data reporting will be used to understand positivity rates within the school (see Test Type 3: Take Home Test Kits for information on test kits for family members or others in the community).

When should we use In-School PCR Response Tests?

- To test a symptomatic person if an antigen test is not available.
- As a confirmatory test if a symptomatic person has a negative antigen test.

- To test close contacts out of quarantine on day 7 after exposure if Take Home Test Kits (see Test Type 3) or Test to Stay, are not available or this is a more efficient option.
- Test event in response to positive cases in the school community. For example, a school may decide to hold a test event because a large number of close contacts have been identified and need to test out of quarantine on the same day.

How does it work?

- Schools prepare, register, and administer the tests using the Binx registration system.
- Participants complete a self-administered PCR nasal swab on school campus with testing supervised by school staff or district or state-provided testing resources.
- Test kits are shipped using prelabeled, prepaid boxes provided by the state using UPS and delivered to the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts for processing. Schools may also arrange for a courier service to pick up, but will have to pay for those shipping costs.
- Results are communicated to the Vermont Department of Health, families and schools through the Binx software platform.
- Schools/districts utilize the CIC and Binx platforms for logistics and administration.

Test type:

- Binx "white label" PCR test kit.

Recommended Use Cases:

- In elementary, middle and high schools where the vaccination rate is less than 80%:
    - Confirmatory In-School PCR Response tests are recommended for symptomatic students with negative antigen test results prior to sending the student home.
    - Test unvaccinated close contacts out of quarantine.
    - Recommended PCR test for vaccinated students and staff who are close contacts of a positive case 3-5 days after exposure.
    - Test events in case of positive cases within the community.
- Middle and high schools with vaccination rates greater than 80%:
    - Strongly recommended: PCR test for unvaccinated students/staff who shared a classroom, space or activity with a COVID-19 positive individual.
    - Optional: PCR test for vaccinated students/staff who shared a classroom, space or activity with a COVID-19 positive individual.

Test Type 3: Take Home PCR Response Testing

Schools should keep on hand, and may give out, Take Home PCR test kits. These self-contained test kits are intended to address a broad range of response testing scenarios. Because they are not tied to school positive case reporting data systems, they can be given to symptomatic students who need to stay home, family members of staff and students and even members of the public.

Who can participate?

- Students (ages 5 and up) and staff, regardless of vaccination status.
- Symptomatic or asymptomatic close contacts.
- Family members of student and staff, including children younger than five years old.

When should we use Take Home PCR Response Tests?

- Symptomatic student or staff member who stays home (family can pick up test kit from school).
- Quarantined close contacts (on day 7 since exposure). The school can send a kit home with the student and indicate on which day they should complete the test.
- When vaccinated students and staff who are close contacts of a positive case are recommended to complete a PCR test 3-5 days after exposure.
- When a staff member has a family member in quarantine, the school can provide a test kit to that family member.
- Anytime that a student, family member, or member of the (school) community is challenged to get a COVID-19 test at a local community test site.

How does it work?

To test, individuals must:

- Register the test kits in Binx using the instructions on the kit either by scanning the QR code using a smartphone or by entering the code on a computer. Adults can provide consent for minors to test through this registration system.
- Follow the instructions on the testing portal to collect their sample.
- Seal their sample and return it the same day to applicable courier service provider (UPS) or return to their school.
- Receive test results via the Binx testing portal (via an email that will link them to their result).

While the tests are intended for "at home" (unobserved) use, they can be self-administered by an individual or their family at any location (including the school parking lot). Test kits include a self-registered test kit, vial, shipping box, and pre-paid courier (UPS) shipping.

Please note: This testing method does not automatically route the test result to the school. Instead the result will only go to VDH and the participant. It is important that schools encourage families to report any positive test results so that schools can conduct contact tracing and, potentially, begin the Test to Stay program.

Test Type:

- Binx "take home kit": a self-contained kit containing a QR code, self-administered nasal swab test kit, prepaid return shipping package.

Recommended Uses:

- For all schools: Take home test kits are a useful tool when students or staff are symptomatic and staying home. A family member can pick up the test kit and either

drop it at a UPS location or bring it back to the school to arrange pick up by UPS at a regularly scheduled time each day.

- Schools that are accepting take home tests may wish to schedule a specific pick-up time each day for UPS and communicate to families that their test kits must be received prior to that time.
- Test kits can be sent home with students or staff when they are identified as close contacts (if Test to Stay programs are not available) and the day they should take the test indicated on the box.
- Test kits can also be provided to family members so that they avoid having to schedule tests a local test site. This use of take home test kits will relieve pressure on local test sites and de-impact the entire testing system.

Surveillance Testing Program

Surveillance testing is a weekly testing program that includes students and staff regardless of vaccination status and is intended to support in-person learning, including extracurricular activities, and monitor for the presence of COVID-19 among the largest unvaccinated population in our state.

Who can participate?

- Students (age 5 and up) and staff, regardless of vaccination status

How does it work?

- Participants complete a self-administered PCR nasal swab once a week on school campus.
- Test kits are picked up by a courier services and delivered to the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts for processing.
- Results are communicated to the Vermont Department of Health, families and schools through the Binx software platform.
- Schools/districts utilize the CIC and Binx platforms for logistics and administration.

Test type:

- Binx "white label" PCR test kit

Recommendations:

- Not recommended for schools with high vaccination rates as defined in Recommendations for Contact Tracing advisory memo of September 22, 2021.