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Support for COVID-19 Screening/Testing to Keep Schools Open & Operating Safely

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For more information contact:
DoH Outreach and Response
Telephone: 701-328-2497
Email: DoHOutreach@nd.gov
Program Interest Survey Link

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life. Undeniably one of the most significant impacts to our student population has been the disruption of school routine, leading to adverse academic, psychological, and economic consequences for students and families.

School-based testing/screening programs have emerged as a leading strategy to reduce the risk of outbreaks. Research from January 2021 shows that, "Weekly screening of all students, teachers, and staff can reduce in-school infections by 50 percent" (Early-Insights-and-Recommendations-for-K-12-Schools-Covid-19-Testing-Lessons-Learned-from-Six-Pilot-Site[3560].pdf).

Additionally, research from the Rockefeller Foundation in May of 2021 showed 50% of parents indicated that "regular COVID-19 testing of staff and students" was necessary for them to feel safe sending their children to school in person.

In partnership with the North Dakota Regional Education Associations (REA) and Local Public Health units (LPH), the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDOH) can support North Dakota (ND) schools with an individualized COVID-19 testing/screening plan. All schools in ND are encouraged to continue to take part in contact tracing. Schools participating in the screening/testing program will have modified close contact guidelines because of the ability to regularly screen close contact cases. These modified guidelines allow students to continue in-person learning and extracurricular activities if they remain asymptomatic, screen daily or every other day throughout the possible time of infection, and all results are negative for COVID-19.

For more information, schools can complete the short interest survey and review the following FAQ document, or contact:

- ND DoH Outreach & Response
  - Phone - 701-498-2497
  - Email – dohoutreach@nd.gov

General FAQs

Why should my school take part in COVID-19 screening/testing?
COVID-19 screening within the school provides easy access to testing for both students and staff. This allows greater confidence for safe in-person learning among parents, students, employees, and the community. Schools can benefit from the implementation or expansion of school nursing that accompanies the screening program to support testing events and other health needs.

We do not have enough staff to facilitate testing or contact tracing within our school; what support is available?
Funding is available for the following options:
- Coordinate with the nearest Local Public Health unit to determine their resource availability.
- Hire a school nurse and/or contract with the ND eCARE School Health program.
- Hire a community member to be trained by the NDDoH.
- Other strategies may be approved. Please contact the NDDoH for details.

Are existing nursing contracts an allowable reimbursement?
Yes. Current nursing contracts with local health care facilities, Local Public Health units, and other qualified agencies are eligible for reimbursement. Please contact the NDDoH with questions regarding reimbursement.

Are e-Nursing and behavioral health services eligible for reimbursement? Would they be reimbursed if a school district already has a contract in place?
Yes. E-Nursing and behavioral health services are reminbursable. Behavioral health services are eligible for reimbursement only if the individual has recently tested positive for COVID-19. Current contracts will be reviewed and for eligability for reimbursement.

Can social workers and other mental health professional services be reimbursable if they are tied to COVID-19?
Yes. All behavioral health services are eligible for reimbursement if the individual has recently tested positive for COVID-19.

Will testing take time away from instruction?
Each school will establish a testing schedule which results in the least disturbance to instruction (i.e., beginning or end of the day, transition to or from recess, a free period in the schedule, etc.)

What kind of tests are available?

Two test options do not require a medically licensed individual, and one test option does require a medically licensed individual.

Non-medical test options:
1. Rapid antigen test (for the screening of asymptomatic individuals only)
    a. The specimen is collected by inserting a swab less than 1 inch into each nostril. Results are available after 15 minutes. The specimen can be self-collected under the supervision of a trained operator or collected by a trained operator.
    b. The rapid antigen test can be collected in very little time, less than two minutes per individual, perhaps less once a routine is established.
2. Saliva PCR test
    1. An individual spits into a specially designed specimen tube until the required amount of saliva is collected (5ml). Collection is supervised by a non-medical individual. The specimen is processed at the state lab. Results are available within 48-72 hours.
    2. The time required for a saliva PCR specimen collection will vary per student and age. It can take anywhere from 30 seconds to five minutes for a saliva collection, but it permits multiple individuals the abilitiy to provide a specimen collection simultaneously, under one supervisor.

Medical test option:
1. Oropharyngeal (throat) PCR tests are also available if qualified medical staff are available to collect the specimen. The specimen is processed at the state lab. Results are available within 48-72 hours.

Is there a testing requirement?
Testing is entirely voluntary for students and staff. There is no set number of tests that must be done or percentage of students/staff that need to be tested. However, the NDDoH requests rapid antigen testing be offered two times/week or PCR testing be offered once per week. If the school cannot do this, or there are several weeks without testing, the NDDoH will reach out to the school contact and discuss possible causes and solutions.

What are some examples of reimbursement options that could be requested if participating in this program?
Reimbursement can be requested through your local REA to cover the cost of PPE, testing supplies (i.e., biohazard bags, pens, labels, Ziploc bags, stopwatches), iPads or other electronic devices used for reporting results, staff to perform testing, contact tracing, e-Nursing staff related to testing, and behavioral health services related to COVID-19 positive students. Other supplies or requests for reimbursement will also be considered on a case-by-case basis.

What if my test result is positive for COVID-19 and all my friends get mad at me because now they must stay home?

- If a student/teacher tests positive, the class can maintain in-person learning by requiring that those individuals remain asymptomatic, screen 2-3 times a week, and .
- Parents that do not want children to be tested will need to arrange daycare and distance learning.
- Behavioral health services can be provided through the e-Nursing program to assist/support student's mental health if they test positive for COVID-19.

If I have been vaccinated, do I have to test? Am I allowed to test?

Vaccinated staff and students do not need to test; however, they can participate in testing events.