State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health

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TO: All Californians

SUBJECT: Testing Framework for K–12 Schools for the 2022–2023 School Year

RELATED MATERIALS: Guidance for K–12 Schools | Frequently Asked Questions around K–12 Testing Framework for 2022/23 School Year | Safe Schools for All Hub | Guidance for the Use of Face Masks| Guidance for Individuals Infected with or Exposed to COVID-19 | COVID-19 Outbreak Definitions | COVID-19 Testing at Schools

Updates as of December 1, 2022:

- Section on testing types updated for clarity.

Background

This document aims to inform California's K-12 schools of COVID-19 testing strategies for the 2022-2023 school year. It is intended to support planning processes for safe in-person learning, as disease management is an essential priority to maintain student well-being and development.

Testing Framework:

Testing for COVID-19 remains an essential tool to decrease transmission, keep students and staff safe, and keep schools open for in-person instruction while mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please refer to the COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K–12 Schools to Support Safe In-Person Learning, 2022–2023 School Year for more specific information on when and who to test in a school setting. This information is being incorporated into this framework by reference.

The following are recommended practices for California districts, schools, and county offices of education:

- **Identify** a COVID Testing Point of Contact to facilitate communication and coordination with the CA Testing Task Force along with other relevant agencies or organizations that oversee school operations.

- **Review** and reference current testing recommendations provided in the CDPH K-12 School COVID Guidance and any additional recommendations or requirements provided by the Local Health Jurisdiction.
- **Maintain** situational awareness of the testing resources and programs offered by the CA Testing Task Force and monitor availability of pre-positioned testing resources housed with a County Office of Education or Local Health Jurisdiction for rapid distribution to schools.
- **Monitor** the CDC's COVID Community Data Tracker as a method of identifying when to increase or reestablish school testing operations.
- **Communicate** any questions, concerns, or additional operational testing resources/needs to the CA Testing Task Force at schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov

The following list describes operational considerations for COVID-19 testing for K-12 schools:

- California is currently offering direct ordering of COVID-19 over-the-counter (OTC) tests to schools. Schools may use OTC tests to supplant on-site testing in many situations. Such efforts should be paired with educational materials to facilitate proper OTC use, particularly in communities with limited English proficiency and/or lower health literacy.

- California also offers COVID-19 OTC tests to all county offices of education (COEs) for use by public and private school students and staff for return from various prolonged school holiday break testing, such as summer and winter breaks. California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has communicated with COEs about a 2022-2023 Winter Break distribution; for more information, please contact your local COE or email schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov.

- CDPH recommends that antigen tests be considered the primary option for detecting COVID-19 in schools, rather than PCR tests. Both the professional, on-site antigen tests as well as the OTC at-home antigen tests have been effective in identifying persons who have infectious levels of all known variants of SARS-CoV-2. PCR tests are highly sensitive, but their utility is greatest as a confirmatory test in appropriate situations and/or in clinical settings. If you are currently participating in a CDPH school-based PCR testing program, please email schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov for more information about transitioning to an antigen testing program, and to learn more about available resources.

- CDPH will continue to support professional on-site antigen testing programs in the 2022-2023 school year. However, the volume of anticipated on-site testing is likely to decrease with the increased availability and ease of OTC tests. We anticipate the workload for on-site testing to substantially decrease for the 2022-2023 school year as OTC testing will often meet testing needs. Thus, state support for school-based testing staff (via End-to-End vendors) will be reduced. For more information, please email schooltesting@cdph.ca.gov.

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If used, PCR or other molecular testing may be considered in limited situations in the school setting:

- People with symptoms who may have a negative initial antigen test AND are at high risk for hospitalization or death from COVID-19 benefit from early treatment. They may consider PCR (or other molecular) test and/or repeat an antigen test (at-home tests are acceptable) in 24 hours if the PCR result has not returned (Updated Testing Guidance). Individuals may consider repeat antigen testing every 24-48 hours until a positive test is returned or until symptoms improve.

- When a participant has ambiguous or invalid antigen test results, even on a repeat test, schools can consider repeating an antigen test in 24-48 hours, or PCR testing as an alternative.

These updates and anticipated changes are based on current scientific knowledge and anticipated trends. The framework is subject to change. As noted in the SMARTER plan, COVID-19 trends can shift rapidly and California's response to conditions in schools must remain nimble, adaptive, and responsive to dynamic challenges to keep students and staff safe.

Preliminary Testing Framework for K-12 Schools for the 2022–2023 School Year originally published on May 27, 2022.

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