

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COVID-19

Updated March 12, 2020

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COVID-19 in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)

Did a CPS employee test positive for COVID-19?

Yes, a Classroom Assistant at Vaughn Occupational High School tested positive for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). This patient was hospitalized on Thursday, March 5, and she remains in stable condition. At the moment, the immediate health risk to the general public in Chicago and the broader CPS community remains low.

Why did CPS decide to close Vaughn Occupational High School?

Given the staff member's movement through the building while she was working and that Vaughn is a high school that serves students with higher medical needs, CPDH made the decision to temporarily close the school to prevent the spread of the virus.

What health measures are Vaughn staff and students taking?

To protect the health of the community and prevent further transmission, all students, staff, and other service providers who were at Vaughn since Tuesday, February 25 have been asked to stay home through Wednesday, March 18 unless seeking medical care, or until given other direction.

What are the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and CPS doing to support Vaughn families?

CDPH and CPS contacted all Vaughn students, families, staff, and service providers. CDPH is following up individually with members of the Vaughn community to learn more about their current health status, gain a better understanding of their underlying medical conditions, talk in detail about their health, and arrange free COVID-19 testing to students and staff if they develop any symptoms. CDPH will decide whether or not to test for COVID-19 during individual conversations with students, families, and staff. All testing requires a specific CDPH appointment.

Additionally, the district completed a thorough environmental cleaning of Vaughn using Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-recommended cleaning protocols.

Vaughn families and staff members who need support communicating with their employers or those who may need food assistance should contact the CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness at oshw@cps.edu or by calling the Healthy CPS Hotline 773-553-KIDS (5437). If you do not have a healthcare provider, the Healthy CPS hotline can also assist.

Do family or household members of Vaughn students or staff have to stay home from work or school?

No. People who were not at Vaughn between February 25 and March 6 do not have restrictions at this time, even if they have been in contact with someone from Vaughn. They can attend work and school, as long as they are not sick. This includes:

- Family members, care providers, or those who share a household with Vaughn students, staff, and service providers.
- Students, faculty, and staff at other schools or other members of the community who may have come into contact with members of the Vaughn community.
- Students who shared the bus with Vaughn students

General COVID-19 Information

How can I find the latest news about COVID-19?

CPS will be sending out regular updates on COVID-19 and will notify the district if this situation develops. For communication purposes, please ensure the district has your up-to-date emergency contact information. For the most reliable information about COVID-19, please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus or www.cdc.gov/coronavirus. For school-specific updates, visit www.cps.edu/coronavirus.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns?

If you have questions about COVID-19 or concerns about exposure, please email CDPH at coronavirus@chicago.gov or call 312-746-4835.

If you have any CPS-specific or school-related concerns, please reach out to the CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness at oshw@cps.edu or by calling the Healthy CPS Hotline 773-553-KIDS (5437) (staffed from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday).

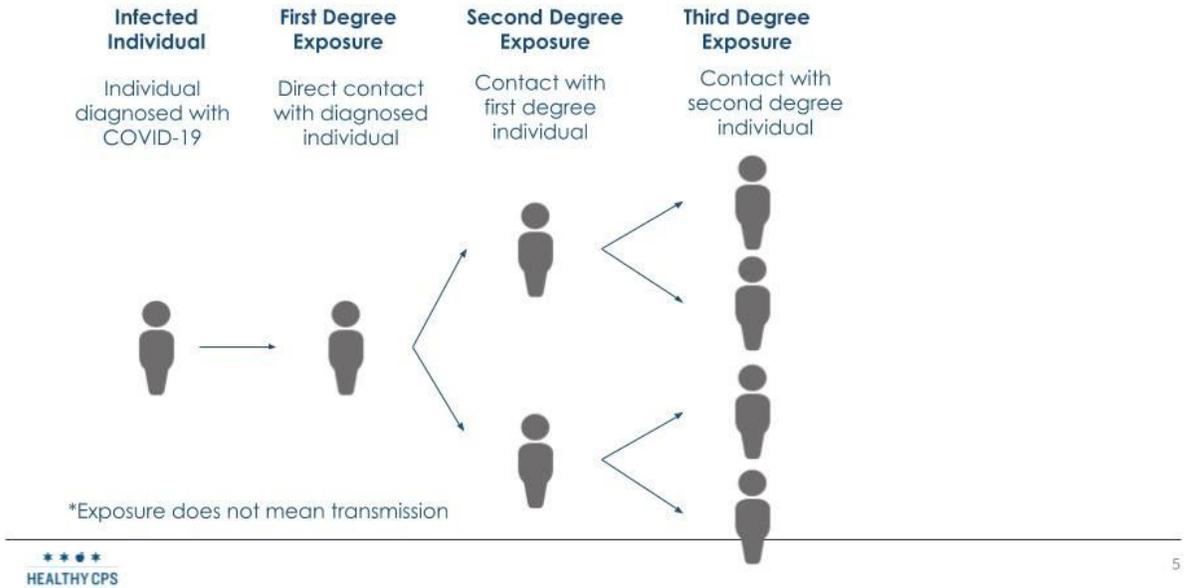
What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Individuals who get sick with COVID-19 develop mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. If you are experiencing these symptoms, please contact your medical provider immediately. Call ahead before seeking care to let them know about your symptoms and possible exposure.

Please note that there are many respiratory viruses that can cause symptoms similar to COVID-19. The best way to prevent the spread of many illnesses, including COVID-19, is by practicing good hygiene such as washing your hands often, covering your cough, and staying home when sick.

What are the different types of exposure to COVID-19?

Types of Exposure



To better understand how this incident affects the broader community, it is important to understand the types of exposure that can occur.

- First, there is exposure to an individual who is infected with COVID-19. This person has **direct contact** with their family, colleagues, and others. People in this group is considered a first-degree exposure.
- Chicago is a big city, but Chicago Public Schools is a close-knit community. We recognize that many first degree contacts are involved in our schools as parents, employees, and volunteers. It is the direction of CDPH that **second-degree contacts**, which are people who have been in contact with a first-degree contact, are **not** required to be notified nor do they need to stay home.
- **Third-degree** contacts are those who had contact with a second-degree contact. Just as the second-degree contact does not have directions to stay home, nor does a third-degree contact

What do I do if I've had first degree exposure to COVID-19?

If you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or if you have traveled to a location, including airport layovers, with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 ([Level 2 or 3 Travel Health Notices](#)), you should stay home for 14 days after your return date. If you develop symptoms such as a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, contact the CDPH at 312-746-4835 and work with your primary care provider.

What do I do if I've had second degree exposure to COVID-19?

At this time, people who have second degree exposure do not have restrictions and can attend work and school, as long as they are not sick. If you develop COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, and difficulty

breathing), call your healthcare provider and explain your symptoms and possible exposure before seeking medical care.

Please note that there are many respiratory viruses that can cause symptoms similar to COVID-19. The best way to prevent the spread of many illnesses, including COVID-19, is by practicing good hygiene such as washing your hands often, covering your cough, and staying home when sick.

How does COVID-19 impact children?

Based on what we have seen in other countries, most cases of COVID-19 cause mild illness. To date, children also appear less likely to become ill.

What do I do if I have COVID-19 symptoms but I don't think I was exposed to COVID-19?

If you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, please contact your medical provider immediately. Call ahead before seeking care to let your provider know about your symptoms.

What do I do if I start feeling sick?

If you feel sick, stay home—you must stay home for any illness. If your symptoms include fever, cough, and breathing difficulty, please contact your medical provider immediately. Do not return to work or school until you are free of fever (oral temperature below 100.4°F) for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications or your symptoms have resolved.

What should I do if I am taking care of someone who is sick?

Contact your primary care physician to schedule any recommended preventive care services. If you have a chronic condition, such as asthma, check in with your primary care provider and ensure you have any refills of medications you may need. Monitor yourself for illness, and if you start to feel sick, please take care of yourself and stay home.

COVID-19 Testing

Why doesn't CDPH test everyone for COVID-19?

Testing for COVID-19 is only a useful option if someone presents with symptoms of the virus (e.g., fever, cough, and shortness of breath). Because COVID-19 tests are nasal and throat swabs, testing those who are not symptomatic would not provide us with reliable results and potentially, false negatives.

When should I get tested for COVID-19?

CDPH decides who should be tested for COVID-19 based on your current health status, underlying medical conditions, your potential COVID-19 exposure, and whether or not you have developed symptoms.

How do I get tested for COVID-19?

All testing requires a specific CDPH appointment. Please email CDPH at coronavirus@chicago.gov or call 312-746-4835.

Can I get tested for COVID-19 if I'm not showing symptoms but I have been exposed to someone with the virus?

If you do not show symptoms (fever, cough, and difficulty breathing), testing for COVID-19 is not a useful option and would not provide reliable results. If you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or if you have traveled to a location, including airport layovers, with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 ([Level 2 or 3 Travel Health Notices](#)), you should stay home for 14 days after your return date.

Preventative Measures

Is CPS planning on closing schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Per the recommendation of public health experts at CDPH, CPS is not considering closing schools at this time. CDPH decided to temporarily close Vaughn because this school serves students with higher medical needs. CPS will follow the recommendations of CDPH in all decisions about whether or not to temporarily close a school if needed. At the moment, the immediate health risk to the general public in Chicago and the broader CPS community remains low.

What actions should I take?

- Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is best, especially if they are visibly dirty. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol is a suitable alternative.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- For more information, please see this [fact sheet](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What actions should schools take?

Schools should review their emergency operations plans and actively encourage staff and students to stay home when sick, wash their hands with soap and water, and cover coughs and sneezes. Schools who are expecting students from other countries as part of an exchange program must contact them and tell them to cancel their travel plans. Any students or staff who feel sick should go home immediately. For more detailed information, please review [this CPS staff guidance document](#) and this [guidance for school administrators](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At this time, CPS is requiring schools to cancel any planned events or large events with more than 50 people. Please refer to the [new guidance](#) regarding gatherings. At this time, no special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning are necessary or recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illness, including COVID-19, but we do encourage schools to review their cleaning protocols and make sure they are strictly followed.

In addition to routine cleaning, what else is CPS doing?

The CPS Department of Facilities are taking the following measures:

- Schools are performing enhanced routine cleaning that includes high-touch surfaces such as door knobs, countertops, and phones.
- The CPS Facilities Department is ensuring all schools have enough hand soap and cleaning supplies, including CDC-approved disinfectants, and are providing every school with hand sanitizer for the main entrance. Every classroom will also receive a pack of 200+ surface wipes.

Are face masks useful?

CDPH does not recommend that people who are not sick wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. However, face masks **should** be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of face masks is also crucial for health workers and others who are taking care of someone who is sick.

When should I self quarantine?

If you have been in direct contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 **or** if you have traveled to a location, including airport layovers, with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 ([Level 2 or 3 Travel Health Notices](#)), you should stay home for 14 days after your return date.

My child doesn't have any symptoms, but I don't want to send my child to school for fear of infection. Is this absence going to be unexcused?

Absences due to coronavirus concerns will be considered excused. CPS' Attendance Policy states that valid excused absences can include "circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent or legal guardian for the safety or health of the student."

What should I do if I want to keep my child home for the rest of the school year?

Homeschooling is suggested if students are planning to stay home for the remainder of the school year. In order to homeschool your child, they would need to be withdrawn from school, and it will be the responsibility of the parent or legal guardian to ensure their child is being instructed at home. Please note that the school will not send work home for the student and the Illinois State Board of Education does not provide recommendations for materials or provide assistance with planning a home school curriculum. However, we have prepared a list of [resources](#) that may be helpful to review if parents or guardians are unsure where to start.

We request the [homeschooling paperwork](#) be submitted to both the school and the CPS Department of Education Policy and Procedures—you can find specific details on the [website](#). The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) only requests the [Home Schooling Registration Form](#).

Per the [Chicago Board of Education policy](#), homeschooled children are entitled to enroll or re-enroll in CPS, and grade placement decisions for previously homeschooled children will be made at the discretion of school administrators. **Please note:** this enrollment/re-enrollment pertains to neighborhood schools. If a student withdraws from a non-neighborhood school, the student could lose their seat.

Students

Are students allowed to wear face masks?

If you're sick, please stay home.

Do pregnant students need to take additional precautions?

Please see [this](#) information from the CDC and reach out to your OB/GYN or primary care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Staff

What should I do if I start to feel sick at work?

Go home immediately and avoid crowds and public spaces, if possible. You must stay home for any illness. If your symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulty, please contact your medical provider immediately.

Do not return to work until you are free of fever (oral temperature below 100.4°F) for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications or your symptoms have resolved.

What support is available to me?

If you are experiencing increased stress related to the COVID-19, please contact our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at 1-800-424-4776 or visit www.magellanascend.com. If you need assistance locating a primary care provider (PCP), please contact BCBSIL at <http://www.bcbsil.com/members> or 1-800-331-8032. Blue Cross Blue Shield and CVS Caremark have made some modifications to their policies to ensure members can easily access the right care and prescriptions. If you participate in these plans, please [click here](#) for more information.

What if I don't have available sick time?

If you don't have available sick time, please contact the Absence and Disability department at cpsloa@cps.edu or 773-553-4748.

What should I do if I have to miss work?

You must report absences to direct supervisors and enter absences into Kronos. Discuss plans for coverage that is consistent with your school or department's process for addressing unplanned staff absences. If you don't have available sick time, please contact the Absence and Disability department at cpsloa@cps.edu or 773-553-4748.

When can I come back to work after being sick?

Do not return to work until you are free of fever (oral temperature below 100.4°F) for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications or your symptoms have resolved.

Do I need a doctor's note to return to work?

No, we are not requiring doctor's notes to return to work to reduce burden on our healthcare system.

Do pregnant staff members need to take additional precautions?

Please see [this](#) information from the CDC and reach out to your OB/GYN or primary care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Are there restrictions for district staff or service providers who work in more than one school?

Please see this [document](#) for most up-to-date information on visitor restrictions at schools.

Extracurriculars, Sports, Public Gatherings, and Scheduled Events

Are schools allowed to have assemblies with large amounts of students?

In light of the continued impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on our communities, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has prepared [restrictions](#) for district events/group gatherings and travel. These restrictions are effective immediately and last until April 12, 2020, or until further notice.

Are all trips canceled or just those outside of Chicago?

All field trips on behalf of the district are postponed until the end of the Spring Break (April 12). Additional guidance will be issued for post-spring break travel in the upcoming weeks.

Will safety audits continue?

Safety audits will be canceled for the foreseeable future.

Travel

What is the CDC's current travel guidance?

Please note that this guidance is evolving—for the most recent recommendations, please visit the [CDC website](#).

If you've traveled to a location, including airport layovers, with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 (Level 3 Travel Health Notices), stay home for 14 calendar days after your return date. As of March 13, 2020 a paid leave of absence will be provided during this time for employees returning from a Level 3 location. Previous requests for a paid leave of absence will be honored.

- [Click here](#) for locations with Level 3 Travel Health Notices. Please continue to check these locations, as they are updated regularly.
- Please contact the CPS Absence and Disability department at cpsloa@cps.edu or 773-553-4748 to inform them about your past, present, or future travel plans and arrange paid leave options.
- Employees must report absences to direct supervisors. Discuss plans for coverage that is consistent with your school or department's process for addressing unplanned staff absences.
- You do not need a doctor's note clearing you to return to work following 14 calendar days at home without symptoms.

- If you experience fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulty upon returning from travel, please contact your medical provider immediately, and request a medical release to return to work after your symptoms have resolved.

If you've traveled to a location, including airport layovers, with sustained (ongoing) community spread (Level 2 Travel Health Notices), **AND** you are an Older Adult (60 y.o. and over) and people of any age with serious chronic medical conditions who are at an increased risk for severe disease should stay home for 14 calendar days after your return date.

- Follow the instructions above for Level 3 Travel Health Notices.
- CDC recommends that older adults or those who have chronic medical conditions consider postponing travel to the following destinations: ([Level 2 Travel Health Notice](#))
- Older adults and people of any age with serious chronic medical conditions are at increased risk for severe disease and should consider postponing nonessential travel.
- Travelers should avoid contact with sick people and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Travelers should monitor their health and limit interactions with others for 14 days after returning from travel.
- Travelers that are sick with fever, cough, or have trouble breathing should stay home and call ahead before seeking medical care.

If you have plans for personal travel to locations with widespread or sustained community transmission of COVID-19 (Level 3 Travel Health Notices), we encourage you to cancel or postpone your plans.

- [Click here](#) for locations with Level 3 Travel Health Notices. Please continue to check these locations as they are updated regularly.
- If you are unable to cancel or postpone your plans, you may not return to work until you have stayed home without symptoms for 14 calendar days following your return home.

What should I do if a family member or someone I've been in close contact with traveled to a location with widespread community transmission of COVID-19?

While the person who did travel is required to stay home for 14 days after returning, your exposure is classified as secondary exposure, and you are not required to take any additional steps at this time.

Are schools allowed to participate in field trips abroad?

All international travel on behalf of the district has been canceled until further notice. If a school previously entered a trip in Oracle that was approved, that trip has been canceled in Oracle.

Can students still go on trips domestically?

Field trips are postponed until further notice.

Do field trips within Chicago need to be canceled?

All field trips on behalf of the district are postponed until the end of the Spring Break (April 12).

Additional guidance will be issued for post-spring break travel in the upcoming weeks.

My international trip on behalf of the district was canceled. When will I be getting a refund?

The district is currently working with travel vendors to work out refunds for anyone who paid for international trips.

Resources and Support

How do I find medical care?

If you need help locating medical care, please reach out to the CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness at healthandwellness@cps.edu or by calling the Healthy CPS Hotline 773-553-KIDS (5437). If you are concerned that you or your child have had direct contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, please contact the CDPH at coronavirus@chicago.gov or call 312-746-4835.

What should I do if I or my child is being bullied or experiencing stigma and discrimination because of COVID-19?

Bullying, harrassment, and discrimination are always unacceptable. COVID-19 does not distinguish between race, nationality, or geographic borders. Stigma and discrimination against people who have the virus or who have family members with the virus discourages early reporting of symptoms and further perpetuates community spread.

- If there is a concern related to student discrimination or bullying, please reach out to the Office of Student Protections (OSP) by calling 773-535-4400 or by emailing osp@cps.edu. You can also contact the Student Safety Center at 773-553-3335.
- If there is a concern related to staff discrimination, please reach out to the Equal Opportunity Compliance Office (EOCO) by calling 773-553-1013 or by emailing eoco@cps.edu.