



# *Proposed Investigation/ Reporting Thresholds and Outbreak Definition for COVID-19 in Educational Settings*

## **BACKGROUND**

Educational institutions are common congregate settings for youth and young adults and may also serve as large employers within a community. Public health investigations within these settings can be complex. It can be difficult to distinguish between transmission within the school versus detection of community cases, particularly in areas experiencing substantial community transmission as defined by state or local jurisdictions.

This document is based on available scientific resources and expert opinion and is intended only as guidance. Educational settings are broadly defined, and include but are not limited to: youth camps, youth programs, childcare centers, preschools, primary through secondary schools, vocational schools, colleges, and universities.

For individual COVID-19 cases, including those in an educational setting, public health authorities should initiate prompt case investigation and contact tracing to prevent transmission and to ensure early outbreak detection. When multiple cases are identified, additional public health assessments in partnership with school officials may be required to determine if the cases meet the definition of an outbreak. Since outbreak investigations require significant resources, prioritization may be necessary. The criteria provided below are intended as guidance for public health authorities to help prioritize investigations within educational settings. In certain settings determined to be high-risk, a single COVID-19 case may warrant additional public health measures.

## **Criteria to Consider for Further Investigation**

Consider the following criteria when determining the need for and type of outbreak investigation:

- Size and characteristics of student and staff population (e.g., population includes individuals with special healthcare needs and/or who are at higher risk for severe illness<sup>1</sup>)
- Setting characteristics and environmental factors that affect transmission (e.g., length of school day, intensity of hands-on instruction, ability to maintain social distancing, need for/sharing of common equipment, physical spacing in classrooms, movement through buildings, proportion of time spent outdoors, involvement in activities that may be more likely to generate aerosols)
- Possibility of spread to others, including to additional individuals outside of the facility (e.g., exposures at large assemblies, on field trips, at extracurricular activities that include students from other schools, on school buses that transport riders from multiple schools)
- Involvement or possibility of spread to affiliated congregate, residential settings (e.g., residence halls, fraternity and sorority houses)
- High suspected number of cases or greater case rate within the educational setting compared to the case rate in the community

- Additional indicators (e.g., increased absenteeism) that might suggest undiagnosed or unreported COVID-19-like activity among students or staff

Additional guidance for managing investigations during COVID-19 outbreaks is available from Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) <sup>2</sup>.

## OUTBREAK DEFINITION

### Outbreak Definition

Two or more\* laboratory-confirmed<sup>†</sup> COVID-19 cases among students or staff with onsets<sup>‡</sup> within a 14-day period, who are epidemiologically linked<sup>§</sup>, do not share a household<sup>\*\*</sup>, and were not identified as close contacts<sup>††</sup> of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing.

### Outbreak-Associated Cases

Confirmed and probable secondary cases among students or staff in the educational setting should be classified as outbreak-associated. Individual cases outside of the educational setting that resulted from secondary transmission from an outbreak-associated case (e.g., a family member of a student or staff) should not be included in the outbreak case count.

### Outbreak Resolution

No new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases<sup>3</sup> identified after 28 days (two incubation periods) have passed since the last known school exposure<sup>‡‡</sup> from a case.

## PUBLIC REPORTING

The need to publicly report a COVID-19 outbreak in an educational setting should be determined by each public health jurisdiction and must balance the need for public disclosure and maintaining patient privacy. Public reporting of outbreaks of significant size or risk to public health should be prioritized.

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\* Health departments may consider a higher threshold for defining an outbreak if there is a high case rate in the community (community transmission).

† Detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in a clinical specimen using a molecular amplification detection test<sup>3</sup>.

‡ Use symptom onset date whenever available. If symptom onset date is unknown or if a case is asymptomatic, use specimen collection date for the first specimen that tested positive.

§ Health departments should verify to the best extent possible that cases were present in the same setting during the same time period (e.g., same classroom, school event, school-based extracurricular activity, school transportation) within 14 days prior to onset date (if symptomatic) or specimen collection date for the first specimen that tested positive (if asymptomatic or onset date is unknown) and that there is no other more likely source of exposure (e.g., household or close contact to a confirmed case outside of educational setting).

\*\* May not apply to investigations in educational, residential settings (e.g., boarding school, dormitories), where cases within shared dwellings may be included.

†† Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes. Data are insufficient to precisely define the duration of exposure that constitutes prolonged exposure and thus a close contact. For updated definition of a close contact, please refer to CDC Contact Tracing Plan Appendices website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact>

‡‡ If last known exposure cannot be determined, the onset date or specimen collection date (whichever is later) of the last identified case should be used.

## REFERENCES

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People Who Are at Increased Risk for Severe Illness. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Managing Investigations During an Outbreak. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/outbreaks.html>.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) – 2020 Interim Case Definition. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nndss/conditions/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/case-definition/2020/>.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- CDC Guidance For Childcare, Schools, and Youth Programs: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>
- CDC Guidance For Colleges, Universities, and Higher Learning: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/index.html>
- CDC Considerations for Youth and Summer Camps: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html>
- CDC Considerations for Youth Sports: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel. <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>

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