

Questions and Answers: COVID-19 Saliva Testing for Minnesota School Staff

12/16/2020

Regular testing is one of many critical strategies for controlling the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and supporting our frontline workers in schools. As Governor Walz continues to prioritize in-person learning while protecting the health and safety of students, educators, staff and families, we have heard that increasing our capacity to test school staff is important.

Governor Walz has asked the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Health to update the Safe Learning Plan, directing all Minnesota public schools who are providing in-person learning (whether as part of an in-person or hybrid learning model) to offer testing for all on-site staff every two weeks beginning January 4, 2021, or whenever they return to in-person or hybrid learning after that date.

The State of Minnesota will supply schools with the training and saliva test kits they need to conduct testing. Minnesota's nonpublic and tribal schools will also have access to testing supplies if they choose to offer tests to their staff. The length of this program is contingent on funding.

Which school staff are eligible to be tested?

All staff who interact with students in-person are eligible to be tested. This includes teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, support staff, nutrition staff, bus drivers and more, beginning in early learning through grade 12. Schools should also include early childhood, child care or school-age care programs that are operating in their building. Staff working in early childhood, child care or school-age care when the district or school is in a distance learning model are not eligible.

Are schools required to offer testing?

Minnesota public school districts and charter schools are required to offer testing if they are providing in-person learning, whether as part of an in-person or hybrid learning model (focusing first on elementary school staff). Nonpublic and tribal schools are not required to offer testing to staff but are strongly encouraged. No school staff member is required to take a test.

Are staff required to participate?

No. Staff are not required to take tests regardless of whether they work in a public, nonpublic or tribal school.

Who will receive the test result?

The test result will be provided via email to the individual tested. The only people who will have access to your private information will be public health staff from MDH and LPH agencies, contracted staff who are helping MDH with its COVID-19 response, and others as required by law.

When will schools begin testing?

In order to manage capacity at the test labs, all school districts, charter schools, nonpublic and tribal schools providing in-person learning, whether as part of an in-person or hybrid learning model, will be assigned a designated testing date within a two week schedule beginning January 4, 2021. Dates will be shared with district and charter COVID-19 coordinators and nonpublic and tribal school leaders.

How will schools receive their testing supplies?

District COVID-19 coordinators and nonpublic and tribal school leaders who are providing any form of in-person learning, will complete an MDE survey to indicate how many school staff will receive tests (including child care and early childhood programs offered in their buildings). Based on this data, the State of Minnesota will ship supplies for the school district, charter school, nonpublic or tribal school to access.

This survey will be completed every two weeks, prior to their designated testing date. Schools that are currently in distance learning but are planning to shift to in-person or hybrid learning can request supplies up to two weeks prior to the transition.

How will staff receive their tests?

School districts, charter schools, nonpublic and tribal schools will be assigned a designated day within a two week schedule on which they will conduct testing. Testing will be led by the COVID-19 coordinator for the district, charter school, nonpublic or tribal school. These coordinators, along with other site-level testing coordinators, will be trained by experts from Minnesota's COVID-19 testing team. During the specified date and time, educators and staff will visit the designated location, where they will self-administer a COVID-19 saliva test. Throughout the process, the testing coordinator and other trained staff will be on-site to assist as needed.

School districts, charter schools, nonpublic schools and tribal schools must communicate details for testing to all in-person staff in their school communities. MDE will provide template communication

which schools can edit and use to ensure staff are informed of the date, time, location and other necessary details related to testing.

What additional testing opportunities are available for school staff?

Like all Minnesotans, school staff are always encouraged to [make an appointment or walk-in](#) at one of Minnesota's COVID-19 free Community Saliva Testing Sites. Additionally, school staff can [order an at-home saliva test](#). All tests are provided at no cost to the recipient, but Minnesotans should provide their insurance information if they have it. School staff can also be tested by their physician or local healthcare provider.

What should a school staff person do if they receive a positive test result?

If a positive test result is received, school staff should follow their employer's policy for reporting a confirmed COVID-19 case and know that the MDH response team will **call** you with important health information for you and the people who live with you. It is important to answer the call from the health department, as the call will provide information about how to keep yourself, your family, and your community safe.

How accurate is the saliva test?

This saliva test is just as accurate as other tests like nasal swabs, according to the test manufacturer. It tests to see whether you currently have the virus that causes COVID-19. It is not an antibody (or serology) test, which can be used to tell if you may have had the virus in the past. The FDA approved this saliva test on April 10, 2020, and the Minnesota Department of Health supports its use.

Why are school staff being asked to test every two weeks?

This frequent testing is used as a screening tool. Knowing that the incubation period for the virus is 14 days, this will allow school staff to be tested regularly enough to detect most asymptomatic cases. When positive cases are detected, they can be quarantined and close contacts can be identified and quarantined, limiting additional potential for spread. Anyone who feels ill between regular in-school testing opportunities should seek testing at another location immediately.

Should school staff test even without symptoms?

Yes. Schools are required to offer testing to help detect asymptomatic COVID-19 cases. School staff who are experiencing symptoms should contact their healthcare provider or visit a [COVID-19 Community Testing Site](#).

How long will the test take?

Registration and testing should take no more than 15-20 minutes. Results are typically available within 48 hours of being received at state saliva testing laboratory sites.

Can school staff still go to work while waiting for test results?

School staff without symptoms or known exposure should continue to go to work while waiting for test results. If a staff member is experiencing symptoms or has knowingly been exposed to COVID-19, they should consult their healthcare provider to get a test and should follow quarantine guidance.

Why aren't students being tested?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not currently recommend universal testing to inform admitting students into school.

Who pays for these tests (insurance, the state, the school district)?

These COVID-19 saliva tests will be provided at no cost educators and school staff. Costs are covered by the state. The State of Minnesota will supply schools with the training and test kits they need to conduct testing every two weeks beginning January 4, 2021.



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