



September 29, 2020

Dear Families,

We are so excited to welcome you back into our school building! As we begin this new school year, the health and safety of all students and staff remains our top concern. That's why many things in our school buildings will look different this year, from face masks to physical distancing in every classroom to disinfecting every school, every night. We are taking all of these steps to ensure that our schools remain safe, our students and staff stay healthy, and that you feel confident sending your children for in-person learning.

Today we are writing to ask for your help with another important element of our health and safety work: testing our students and staff for COVID-19. Keeping school buildings open depends on helping us stay aware of and take immediate action to address COVID-19 concerns in our buildings. That's why we have partnered with NYC Health + Hospitals, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the NYC Test & Trace Corps to arrange for testing of NYC DOE students and staff for COVID-19 infection.

Our testing partners will test a randomly selected group of staff and students in schools once per month. The number of children and staff to be tested each month will depend on the size of the school population. In addition to the random monthly testing, we are also working hard to offer in-school testing later this year for students who are showing symptoms of COVID-19, or are a confirmed close contact of someone in the school who has tested positive. The test is easy, quick, and safe. Instead of the "long swab" that goes in the back of the nose, this test is a short, small swab (like a Q-Tip) that goes just in the front of the nose. Later this school year, it is possible that tests will be administered by collecting a small amount of saliva (spit).

In order for us to administer a COVID-19 test to your child, we need your consent. We strongly encourage you to sign and return the attached consent form as soon as possible.

Monthly testing of randomly selected staff and students is a vital part of our efforts to prevent COVID-19 transmission in our buildings, because it helps identify positive COVID-19 cases when symptoms are not present. As with other health and safety measures we are requiring to keep our staff and students safe, the success of this testing initiative relies on the partnership and cooperation of staff and students.

While consent to testing is not mandatory, providing our testing partners with a sufficient monthly sample size to identify the prevalence of COVID-19 is critical in our ongoing fight against this virus and to ensure we can keep school communities in school buildings for in-person learning. For the safety of our school community, students who do not have consent forms on file may be required to learn remotely if we do not receive forms from enough students in the school.

We want to assure you that if your child is selected for testing but is uncomfortable or unable to be tested, we will not test your child and will work with you to address any concerns so that they can participate in future testing. We are focused on making this a brief, and gentle experience for our students, led by trained testers.

If your child is tested, we will let you know they were tested and when and how you will receive the results, which will typically be provided within 48-72 hours.

We know you likely have questions, and we are sharing more information in the attached Frequently Asked Questions document. Please review this with your child.

Testing in schools will begin in October. You can reach out to your school at any time with any questions or concerns.

We deeply appreciate your partnership and your commitment to keeping your school community safe and healthy.

Sincerely,



Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene



Ted Long, MD, MHS
Executive Director, NYC Test & Trace Corps



Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor, New York City Department of Education

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COVID-19 TESTING IN SCHOOLS

Here are answers to some frequently asked questions:

CONSENT FROM FAMILIES

What happens to my child if I do not provide consent?

We strongly encourage families of all students participating in-person learning to provide consent. The more students that participate, the better our ability will be to monitor COVID-19 transmission in our school communities. This testing is essential to keeping your child and your child's school community safe and healthy, and ensuring the school building can stay open and in-person learning can continue.

You and your child always have the right to refuse testing. Families who do not provide consent may be required to participate in remote-only learning.

How long is my consent in effect?

Your consent will remain in effect until September 30, 2021. However, you can withdraw consent at any time.

How do I withdraw consent?

Notify your child's school in writing. Your school will designate a contact to receive these communications.

TESTING PROCESS

Will all students be tested?

All district school students participating in blended learning in grades 1-12 may be included in the random sample.

Who will be testing my child?

A trained individual will conduct the test. Testing will be provided by, among others, school nurses, City staff, and our partners: SOMOS, Bio Reference Laboratory, and Fulgent Genetics.

How will the testing work?

Once a month, one of these providers will visit your child's school with a randomly selected list of students and staff to be tested that day. The testing provider will set up in a designated area in the school. Staff from the school or the testing team will visit the appropriate classroom to retrieve students from that class who have been selected to be tested that day; those students will be escorted to the testing area, tested quickly, and then escorted back to their classroom.

What test will be used? Is it painful?

The test will use a "short swab" (similar to a Q-tip) that is inserted into the front part of the nose for five to ten seconds. We understand that some students may be nervous about testing, but the test is not painful and should not be uncomfortable for your child. The test should take no more than two minutes from start to finish.

Will all tests be done by a trained tester, or can some students self-administer tests?

Some of the test kits can be self-administered. Self-administered means that you can open the kit and follow the directions for inserting a small swab (like a Q-tip) into the front of both nostrils. In schools with these kits, some older students in may be able to self-administer their test if they choose, under the supervision of a testing provider or school staff member.

Are students escorted to the testing area in a group or one-by-one? Will more than one student be waiting in an area to be tested?

Students will be escorted with any members of their class/pod who are also being tested. Social distancing will be maintained at all times. Face coverings will be worn at all times, except for the very short period when a student must remove their covering to allow for collection of the test specimen.

Can parents accompany their children to be tested?

Unfortunately, no. To maintain the classroom pods and reduce the risk of COVID-19 being introduced into the building, parents will not be able to accompany their children during the test. We understand that this may feel scary, particularly for younger children. Our trained staff will ensure the testing is performed swiftly, gently, and in a positive environment for all children.

How long is the testing process expected to take?

The cotton swab is in the nose for five to ten seconds, so the entire process of explaining the test to the child and then swabbing them generally takes only minutes.

How long will my child be out of class?

The testing will not take long. We do not expect any child to be out of class for more than 15-30 minutes total from the time that they are picked up at their classroom until they are escorted back to class.

My child is not comfortable communicating in English. Will interpreters be available to explain the process to students who are multilingual learners? If so, how will this be arranged?

Every testing partner will have policies and procedures for how they provide services to individuals in their preferred language. Please communicate with your principal in advance if you have specific concerns.

What if my child cannot be tested due to their documented disability?

If your child has a documented disability and testing would impair your child's mental or physical health due to that disability, please contact your school to discuss how to proceed.

If I get my child tested elsewhere, can I share those results and be released from in-school mandatory testing?

No. To have an accurate understanding of each school population, testing for this program must be performed on a single day, in the school building, and by one provider. If your child is tested at an outside location and they test positive you must keep your child home and report that test to your principal. However, no outside test can be counted in the monthly survey.

How often will my child be tested?

Testing will occur at each school once per month. Your child will not be tested more than once per month unless they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or have close contact with someone who is confirmed positive for COVID-19. Some children may be chosen for monthly testing more than once during the school year.

When/how will I know if my child has been chosen for testing?

You will be notified by your school about two days before your school is scheduled to be tested. By consenting, your child may be included in the random sample for the testing day. If your child is tested, you will be notified after school that day.

How can I help prepare my child for the test (especially for younger children)?

You should talk to your child about testing. We encourage you to tell them that the doctors, nurses, and other health professionals at school need to make sure they are healthy, so they are going to do a test for the virus by

rubbing a small cotton swab inside the front part of their nose. Remind your child that it's okay that the school performs this test and that it's quick, safe, and gentle.

Are staff being tested?

Yes, we are asking all staff and students in school buildings to participate in the testing program.

TEST RESULTS

When will results be available?

Results will be available within 48-72 hours after the sample is taken.

When will I receive my child's results?

In most instances, parents/guardians will receive results no more than 48 hours after the specimen arrives at the laboratory. You will be able to log into an online portal to access your child's results. If your child tests positive, you will also receive a call from the provider who completed the testing.

What happens if my child tests positive?

You should keep your child home from school and contact their physician. Additionally, the Test & Trace Corps will contact your family to provide resources, connections to care if you require support, and to discuss how to keep your child and other household members safe. The school will also be notified to ensure steps are taken to protect other members of the school community. The Test & Trace Corps will provide your family with resources and will monitor your family for symptoms for 10 to 14 days.

Will overall results from testing across a school be shared with the school community?

Yes, but names or any other identifying information of the children or staff who test positive will not be released.

Will the DOE/City ensure that my child's personal information remains confidential?

Any information related to in-school testing is confidential and protected under the New York City Health Code and other local, state, and federal laws. We will store information securely, and only DOE and city staff will have access to test results by name and other personal information.

Where and how will test results be stored?

Results will be sent to two places: to the State and City Departments of Health, where all communicable disease results are sent; and to the Test & Trace Corps and associated City staff to facilitate closing of classrooms or school buildings and to support contact tracing as necessary to ensure we protect all students, staff, and family members. These entities operate under strict privacy and confidentiality protocols.