



Responding to COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in the School Setting

August 11, 2021

The information on the following pages provide a general outline of how schools should and, in some cases, must respond to cases in the school setting; what schools can expect from Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) in response to cases in the school setting; and resources to assist schools in their response. The focus of the flow chart is on cases occurring in settings involving students.

As a reminder, TCHD has a statutory duty to investigate and control the spread of disease in schools. While the information below provides information on how cases in schools will be addressed in most situations, each situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis by either the school, TCHD, or both agencies.

| Number of Cases | | |
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| Individual/Unconnected Cases | Suspect Outbreak 2-4 Connected Cases Within a 14-Day Period | Outbreak 5 or More Connected Cases within a 14-Day Period |

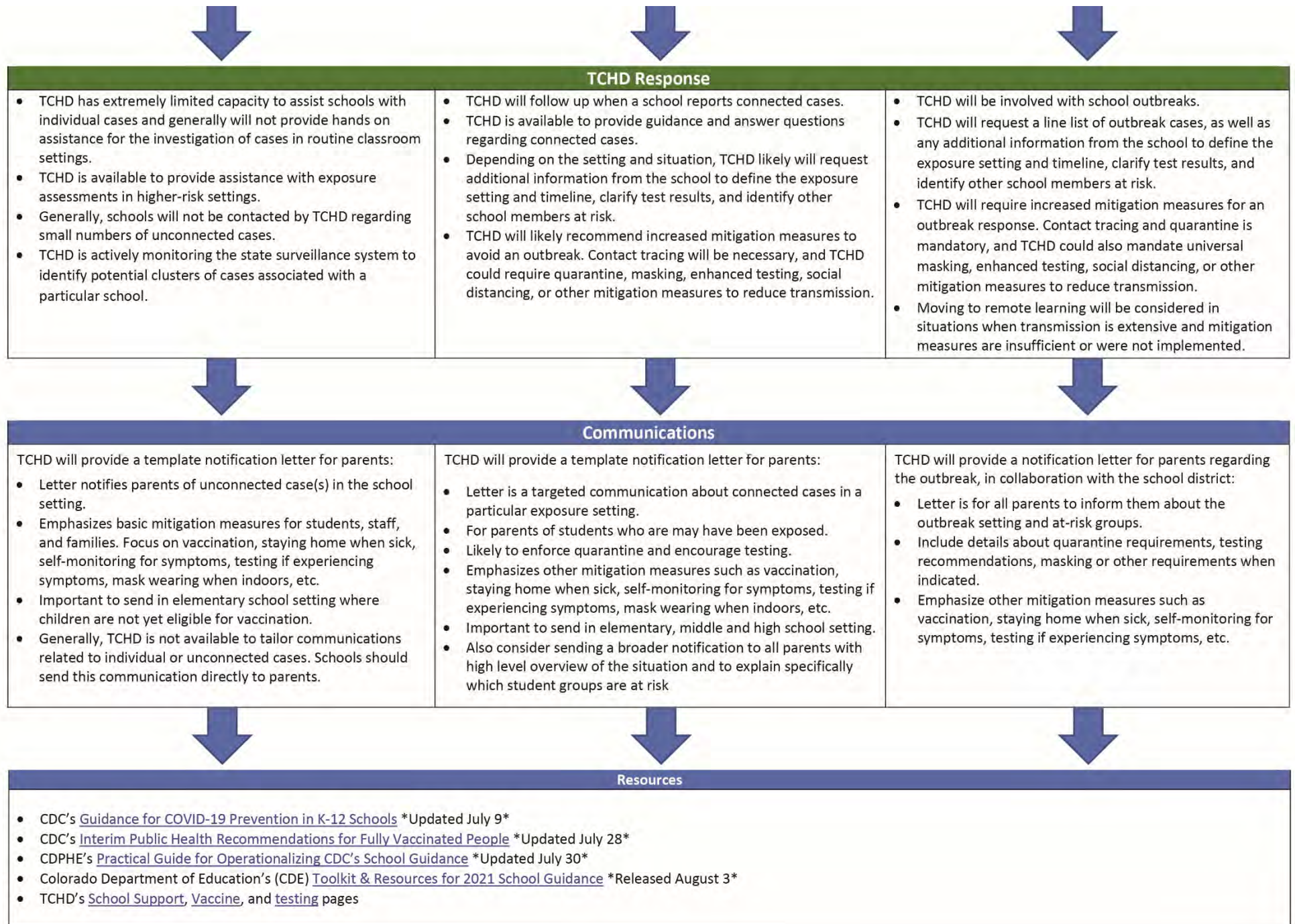


| School Response | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools need to have established internal systems to independently evaluate a newly reported case as they are identified. Namely to ensure the case has isolated, to determine the exposure settings (classroom or a higher risk settings), and to assess whether the new case is linked to previously identified cases in the school. Keep an internal school line list of cases. To aid in tracking, for each case notate date of testing/illness onset; when person was present at school prior to diagnosis; and relevant information about grades or extracurricular activities attended while infectious. We encourage schools to notify parents when a case occurs in the school for situational awareness and to promote individual preventive measures. TCHD will provide a template notification letter for parents that can be sent directly from the school/school district. This approach is especially important in the elementary school setting where children are not yet eligible for vaccination. For individual cases in routine classroom settings, per CDPHE School Guidance and in order to retain in person learning, contact tracing and quarantine is not required. However, schools should remain alert for additional cases in the classroom occurring up to 14 days after the initial case began isolation. For individual cases identified in higher-risk school settings [¥] (i.e., not routine classroom), the school should conduct contact tracing using standard exposure criteria (within 6 feet for 15 or more minutes). Management of exposed persons should follow the usual protocols based on vaccination status. Unvaccinated exposed persons should quarantine. Vaccinated exposed persons do not need to quarantine. Any exposed person should watch for symptoms, and if symptoms develop then isolate and get tested. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When schools have identified several cases who are connected because of a common school exposure during a 14-day period, this could represent a suspect outbreak. These situations require additional attention to avoid an outbreak from developing. Assess and document where/when there were common exposures between the connected cases. Try to determine whether the common exposure occurred in a single, specific setting (e.g., sports team practice), or whether the exposure was ongoing (e.g., gradual spread in a classroom). Exposed groups may include a class, grade level, lunch period, bus, sports team, etc. Keep your internal school line list up to date to track connected cases. Contact tracing is necessary to determine which students or staff remain at risk for continued exposure and spread of disease. Based on the situation, when there is evidence of connected cases or a suspect outbreak, quarantine will likely be necessary for exposed persons. Remain alert for additional cases among exposed persons occurring up to 14 days from when connected cases were identified. Also monitor for cases occurring in other school settings that could indicate more widespread transmission. Send targeted communication to exposed persons to institute mitigation measures (such as quarantine, testing, symptom monitoring). TCHD will provide a template notification letter for parents that can be sent directly from the school or school district. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outbreaks require the highest level of attention and effort from school leaders. There will be collaboration with TCHD. Assess and document the persons identified in the outbreak and where/when there were common exposures between cases. Determine whether the common exposure occurred in a single, specific setting (e.g., sports team practice), or whether the exposure was ongoing (e.g., gradual spread in a classroom). Exposed groups may include a class, grade level, lunch period, bus, sports team, etc. Ensure a school line list remains up to date to track cases moving forward. Contact tracing is mandatory to determine which students or staff remain at risk for continued exposure and spread of disease. Quarantine is required for exposed, unvaccinated persons. Testing of exposed persons is strongly recommended, regardless of vaccination status. Masking might need to be instituted. Remain alert for additional cases among exposed persons occurring up to 14 days from when outbreak cases were identified. Also monitor for cases occurring in other school settings that could indicate more widespread transmission. Send targeted communication to exposed persons to institute mitigation measures (such as quarantine, testing, symptom monitoring). TCHD will provide a template notification letter for parents that can be sent jointly from the school/school district and TCHD. |
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| Reporting Requirements | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report individual cases to TCHD. If other cases are identified that could be connected to an existing case, report to TCHD. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report connected cases and information on school investigation to TCHD. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report outbreaks to TCHD and cooperate with disease investigation activities. Share updated line list with TCHD on a regular basis (at least weekly but could be more often). |
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Definitions

- **Routine classroom settings:** seated classroom, routine physical education class, lunchroom meal times, sporadic singing in classroom setting.
- **Higher-risk activities/settings:** extracurricular activities outside the routine classroom setting, contact sports (football, wrestling, etc.), indoor choir or band.
- **Connected cases:** cases among students/teachers/staff from separate households with onset within 14 days of a common school-based exposure (such as being in the same shared physical environment like a common classroom, sports team, or non-classroom school activity).
- **Suspect outbreak:** 2 to 4 connected cases.
- **Outbreak (from CDPHE):** Five or more cases of COVID-19, of which at least one case has had a positive test, among students/teachers/staff from separate households with onset within 14 days in a single classroom/activity or other close contact in the school setting (including transportation to- from- school and affiliated events). Outbreaks can expand and be prolonged if there are new waves of cases in subsequent 14-day periods that can be linked back to the original outbreak setting.