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NCDHHS

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NCDHHS Expands Access to COVID-19 Rapid Testing in K-12 Schools

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services will be expanding access to COVID-19 rapid testing in K-12 public schools to protect students, teachers and staff from COVID-19. When schools implement testing combined with the state's strong mitigation strategies, they can detect new cases to prevent outbreaks and reduce the risk of further transmission.

RALEIGH

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services will be expanding access to COVID-19 rapid testing in K-12 public schools to protect students, teachers and staff from COVID-19. When schools implement testing combined with the state's strong mitigation strategies, (https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov

/guidance#schools) they can detect new cases to prevent outbreaks and reduce the risk of further transmission.

Tests will be available at no cost to all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and charter schools to test students and staff who have COVID-19 symptoms and to screen staff. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html?mc_cid=a44d030b8c&mc_eid=764de28299) recommends diagnostic and screening testing as an ***additional*** prevention measure to the essential mitigation strategies of mask use and physical distancing, among others, which aligns with DHHS's StrongSchoolNC guidance. (https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/Strong-Schools-NC-Public-Health-Toolkit.pdf?mc_cid=a44d030b8c&mc_eid=764de28299)

From December 2020 through February 2021, NCDHHS conducted a pilot (/news/press-releases/ncdhhs-selects-17-school-districts-11-charter-schools-across-state-participate) for COVID-19 testing with 17 public school districts and 11 charter schools.

"This has been a huge benefit for our working parents and staff," said April Hardy, school nurse for Lenoir County Public Schools and liaison for the Lenoir County health department. "Our staff has been able to rapidly identify positive cases and conduct contact tracing in a timely manner; thus, keeping our school safe. In addition, staff and students identified as close contacts have been able to return back to school sooner with such easily accessible tests."

The experience from Lenoir County Schools and other pilot participants informed the statewide expansion of testing for K-12

schools.

"Layering mitigation efforts is essential to reduce the spread of the virus as we re-open our schools," said State Health Director and NCDHHS Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Elizabeth Cuervo Tilson. "We are excited to be expanding beyond pilot schools to offer this additional layer of mitigation to interested LEAs and charter schools."

LEAs and charter schools may choose to request tests for any of the options below. Testing is not required for schools to provide in-person instruction. (/news/press-releases/ncdhhs-updates-guidance-k-12-schools-instructs-schools-open-person-instruction)

1. Testing all individuals, including students, their families and school staff, who are symptomatic or had known exposure to a confirmed positive case, and/or
2. Once weekly screening of all adults – including teachers and staff

All LEAs and charter schools interested in providing testing must meet certain requirements, including obtaining parental/guardian consent prior to testing, maintaining adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, having trained personnel to administer tests or partnering with a local health provider, and reporting test results to public health.

For more information on the above requirements, please see StrongSchool NC's K-12 COVID-19 Antigen Testing Interim Guidance. (https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/education/K-12-COVID-19-Antigen-Testing-.pdf?mc_cid=a44d030b8c&mc_eid=764de28299)

For more information on school re-openings, mitigation efforts or other school-specific guidance or question, please email StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov (mailto:StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov).

This press release is related to: