Quick Guide for Childcare Programs: COVID-19 infections, symptoms, and exposures

Last updated March 11, 2022

This guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) for local use. It will be posted at sfcdcp.org/school.

AUDIENCE: Childcares, preschools and other programs for children <5 years old not affiliated with a TK-12 school site.

PURPOSE: To help understand the isolation and quarantine options available for children <5 years old.

BACKGROUND: For children younger than 5 in San Francisco, infections with the Omicron variant have been mild in the vast majority of cases, characterized by symptoms in line with other seasonal respiratory illnesses.

In light of this, and of the manifold developmental benefits to attending childcare programs, SFDPH has permitted the following modifications to standard isolation and quarantine practice in those settings.¹ These modifications are designed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while minimizing program closure and absences.

What to do for COVID-19 infections, symptoms, and exposures

Child has symptoms of COVID-19 and no known contact or exposure.

Send the child home with instructions to test. If the test is negative AND they have been fever-free for 24 hours or more without the use of fever-reducing medications AND the child’s other symptoms are improving, they may return to the program. The following are symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher) or chills
- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell that started in the last 10 days. Children may say that food “tastes bad” or “tastes funny”
- Feeling out of breath or having a hard time breathing
- Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting
- Fatigue

¹ Individual programs may continue to impose additional measures.
• Muscle aches or body aches

**Child has a confirmed COVID-19 infection.**
• If the student was at school while they were infectious, report the case using the [Shared Portal for Outbreak Tracking (SPOT)](#). Non-English-speaking programs may leave a voicemail at (628)217-7499.
• Children may return to childcare after 5 days of isolation, if they meet the criteria in SFDPH [Isolation and Quarantine guidance](#) (see “If you tested positive or were diagnosed with COVID-19”). It is strongly recommended they continue to wear a mask indoors aside from eating, drinking and napping.

**Child has close contact to a person with COVID-19.**
• *If exposure was at the childcare program:* As long as they do not have symptoms, children of any age may continue to attend the program with regular testing. It is not necessary to determine masking status or close contact to the individual case. Exact timing of testing may vary and can be determined by the program following either the “modified quarantine” or “group tracing models”. See [CDC “Test-to-stay” guidance](#) or [CDPH's group tracing model](#).
• *If exposure was in the household:* follow SFDPH [Isolation and Quarantine guidance](#). Children cannot return to the program until their quarantine period has ended. All children, regardless of age, are eligible to end quarantine any time after 5 days if they meet criteria.
• *Symptomatic children:* if a child becomes symptomatic after any close contact or exposure, they should isolate immediately if they are not already doing so and test. See [COVID-19 Schools & Childcare Decision Tree](#)

**Case clusters**
If 5 or more students in a classroom are confirmed positive, consult with SFDPH for next steps regarding management of potential clusters and quarantine recommendations.

**Additional Resources**
• For COVID-19 Isolation & Quarantine Decision Tree for Children, see [COVID-19 Schools & Childcare Decision Tree](#)
• For detailed guidance COVID-19 recommendations and requirements for childcare programs, see [SFDPH Guidance for Programs for Children and Youth](#).
• For staff and other adults in childcare settings, see SFDPH’s main [Isolation and Quarantine](#) guidelines.
• Find out about [Covid-19 testing options in San Francisco](#)
• [Tips for testing children for COVID-19 at home](#)