



San Francisco Department of Public Health

San Francisco Department of Public Health Roles and Responsibilities on COVID-19 Cases, Clusters, and Outbreaks in Schools

October 21, 2021

This document was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH) for local use. It will be posted at <https://sfcdcp.org/school>.

AUDIENCE: Public, private, and parochial TK-12 schools in San Francisco.

PURPOSE: To help TK-12 schools understand clinical practices necessary when there is a confirmed COVID-19 case, cluster or outbreak at school sites.

Procedures and Protocols

San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH) conducts several procedures and protocols to support schools when there are COVID-19 cases, clusters and/or outbreaks. This includes determining if a school exposure has occurred as well as case investigation, contact tracing, and outbreak investigation and management.

As a matter of SFPDH policy and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the students and schools, **SFPDH does not publicly share if there has been an outbreak at a specific school site.** We do not publicly report the names of individual schools where outbreaks have occurred. We notify the school leadership when there is an outbreak at a school while maintaining patient privacy and confidentiality in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). School leadership should then notify individual school sites.

Lastly, SFPDH does not publicly report any data points that are less than 5 in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality per our privacy standards as determined by the SFPDH Privacy Officer.

School roles and responsibilities:

- Schools assist SFPDH on next steps by collecting names and contact information of all those considered close contacts after confirmation of a case onsite.
- Schools also notify parents and caregivers if there has been a case at school and/or if individuals are close contacts using SFPDH advisory templates.
- Schools communicate with SFPDH on progress toward any recommended action items needed to reduce likelihood of transmission at schools.

SFPDH roles and responsibilities:

- SFPDH provides guidance to schools on reports of symptomatic individuals and upon confirmation of any positive cases [per the SFPDH Guidance for infections, symptoms, and exposures](#).

- After receiving information from schools through School Portal for Outbreak Tracking (SPOT) or the [SFDPH exposure investigation tool](#), SFDPH investigates all cases to confirm whether COVID-19 exposure occurred on school sites.
- SFDPH performs an internal review for possible in-school transmission or outbreaks at schools that report two or more COVID-19 cases within a 14-day period, based on the information provided to us by the school and enhanced case investigation.
- If SFDPH confirms that there was a single, isolated case of in-school transmission, SFDPH does not routinely discuss this finding with the site, unless the review indicates additional measures are indicated to mitigate further transmission.
- If SFDPH confirms that an outbreak occurred at a school, SFDPH discusses these findings with school leadership and reviews whether or not any additional measures are indicated to mitigate further transmission.
- SFDPH does not discuss findings and processes with families that are not involved in cases, clusters, or outbreaks to ensure patient privacy and confidentiality.
- SFDPH does not routinely reach out to people identified by schools as close contacts. Schools perform the important work of identifying close contacts, and notifying those individuals using SFDPH advisory templates. This allows SFDPH to focus resources on robust case investigation, outbreak management, transmission review and vaccination efforts. SFDPH provides quarantine education, information and support to close contacts through the [COVID Resource Center](#).
- In certain circumstances, SFDPH may request that a school submit a list of close contacts, or a school may make a special request that SFDPH proactively call those identified as close contacts.

Definitions

COVID-19 case: A student or staff member who is confirmed positive for COVID-19.

Close contact: Close contact is being within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more in 24 hours, even if both people were wearing masks.

COVID-19 cluster: There are two or more cases from non-related households within 14 days at the same school.

COVID-19 school outbreak: There are three or more cases in non-related households within 14 days in which the source of infection occurred at the same school, and not another setting.

School Exposure: Schools notify SFDPH if there are students or staff who are symptomatic or a confirmed case. SFDPH works with school leadership on next steps, including recommendations to test symptomatic individuals or close contacts.

Case Investigation: SFDPH staff work with cases to help them remember everyone with whom they have had close contact during the timeframe while they may have been infectious.

Contact Tracing: The notification of close contacts to let them know they have been exposed to a

confirmed COVID-19 case without identifying the case to protect patient privacy. SFDPH staff provide close contacts with quarantine education, information, and support through the COVID Resource Center.

Outbreak Management: SFDPH investigates clusters at schools and determines whether these cases are linked at the school site. Outbreak management involves close communication with school leadership, including steps to reduce further transmission and possibly outbreak testing within 5 days of confirmed outbreak.