

A FACT SHEET FOR SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

HOW TO BE PROTECTED FROM COVID-19 AT WORK



SCHOOL ACTION FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH

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Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation

This factsheet was developed by the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at the University of California Berkeley as part of the School Action for Safety and Health (SASH) program administered by the Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation in the California Department of Industrial Relations through an interagency agreement with LOHP at UC Berkeley.

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HOW TO BE PROTECTED FROM COVID-19 AT WORK



The public expects schools to do their best to protect students and their school employees from illnesses such as COVID-19 and its variants. California schools are presently required to follow Cal/OSHA regulations as well as orders from the Governor, the State health department, and local health departments. This fact sheet will focus on employee rights and protections under Cal/OSHA, as well as other statewide requirements for schools to protect their employees. (See the back page for more resources for employees.)

Cal/OSHA requires all employers in California to provide a safe workplace. The Emergency Temporary Standard on COVID-19 details key rules and procedures that your employer—the school, school district or other Local Educational Agency—must have in place. This standard may be revised as policy and lawmakers learn new facts and evidence about COVID-19 transmission and best practices for its prevention. The [latest revision](#) (January 14, 2022) incorporates the status of vaccinated and unvaccinated employees but still requires that schools have a [COVID-19 prevention plan](#). Schools also must follow the [K-12 School Guidance](#) from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and health orders from their [local health department](#).

California’s Cal/OSHA COVID-19 standard is the main law that deals with the prevention of COVID-19 infections on the job. CDPH requirements protect both students and employees. Schools need to follow the requirements of both Cal/OSHA and CDPH.

Under Cal/OSHA's regulations, to protect school employees, schools must:

1. Have a symptom-screening program so employees who **have symptoms of COVID-19 do not come to work**. Schools must let their employees know about their eligibility for paid leave.
 - **CDPH** is encouraging schools to participate in the [CDPH K-12 School Testing Program](#), to use regular testing as a way to quickly identify cases. COVID-19 testing can detect the virus even before someone starts to feel sick.
2. Make sure the [ventilation system](#) is properly maintained and doing the best job possible to bring in outdoor air and “refresh and clean” the indoor air. Adequate and constant airflow in classrooms and school buildings helps remove air that may contain the virus and replaces it with healthy air.
3. Provide appropriate **face coverings** for employees. **CDPH** currently [requires all teachers and students to wear face coverings](#) at this time, regardless of vaccination status, with limited exceptions. Make sure face coverings are worn properly at all times by anyone who is on site. Face coverings are simple and very effective. They keep the virus from spreading in the air from one person to another indoors.
4. Provide **time and supplies to clean** surfaces that are touched frequently, like door knobs. According to the CDC, in general [cleaning once a day is usually enough](#)—we know now that COVID-19 is unlikely to spread easily through contact with surfaces. Soap and water are usually sufficient, or use [safe disinfectants](#).

5. **Provide soap, water, and time** so employees can wash their hands regularly. Provide hand sanitizer (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) for use in between handwashing, for those who can use it safely. Washing hands regularly reduces the amount of germs on your hands, which prevents the spread of COVID-19 from touching surfaces.
6. NOTE: While **physical distancing** is no longer required, unless there is an outbreak of three or more employees, it is still an important tool to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Employers can still require physical distancing or barriers as protective measures. Being outdoors as much as possible is a way to protect students and staff.

Vaccination is key to preventing transmission

COVID-19 vaccines are effective. They decrease the chances of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19. Because students under 12 have only recently become eligible for vaccination, and will not be fully vaccinated in large numbers for months, it is especially important that the adults around them are vaccinated.

School employees in California are [now required to provide proof of full vaccination](#), or to be tested regularly—at least once a week. Some districts have stricter requirements.

HOW TO BE PROTECTED FROM COVID-19 AT WORK

Safety Layers to Keep Schools Safe



Covid-19 Vaccine



Masks



Testing



Stay Home When Sick



Hand Washing



Ventilation

If school employees are exposed or infected with COVID-19 on the job, the school must:

1. Offer free testing, during paid time.
 - For employees who are not vaccinated, free testing on work time must be offered, regardless of whether the person was exposed at work
2. Guarantee paid time if workers have to take time off, but are able and available to work.
3. Let workers know when they can return to work. The rules are different for fully vaccinated and unvaccinated employees.

4. Investigate how workers got infected and who else was exposed.
5. Take more steps when 3 or more employees are infected, as this is considered an outbreak. For example, they need to test all employees and let their local health department know.

Employees have the right to know!

- Your school or district must provide prevention training to employees on COVID-19 and the steps they are taking to prevent or minimize infections.
- If you are exposed at work, your school must let you know in writing.
- You can ask for and get a copy of your school's written plan to prevent COVID-19.

What you can do:

1. Many people with COVID-19 have no symptoms but can still spread it to others. Everyone needs to follow all the steps to prevent the spread, including:
 - Maintain your distance from others when you can—at least 6 feet, including during breaks and lunchtime.
 - Wear face coverings—make sure the covering is over your nose and mouth and fits snugly to your face.
 - Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds.

HOW TO BE PROTECTED FROM COVID-19 AT WORK

2. Tell your supervisor if you have symptoms or were exposed to COVID-19.
 - If you are unvaccinated, don't go to work and stay away from others until you can be tested (5 days or later after exposure) and get the results. If you do not have symptoms, you can return after Day 5 if you have a negative test result, or after Day 10 without testing.
 - If you are vaccinated and **not experiencing symptoms**, you do not need to stay away from work, but CDPH recommends that you get tested and self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days.
 - You can find a testing site at covid19.gov or by calling 1-833-422-4255.
 - It is illegal for employers to retaliate if you need to take leave.
3. The law protects you when you speak up about safety. You have the right to:
 - Raise concerns.
 - Identify hazards and suggest solutions.
 - Join with your co-workers to ask for changes.
 - File a complaint with a government agency. (See "Get help" below.)

Need more information?

- Safe Schools for All Info Hub: <https://schools.covid19.ca.gov>, with these links & more:
 - [CDPH 2021/22 K-12 School Guidance](#)
 - [CDPH Guidance on the Use of Masks](#)
 - [CDPH Ventilation Guidance: Considerations for Reopened Schools](#)
 - [CDPH K-12 School Testing Program](#)



- [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard FAQs](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Schools](#)
- [School Action for Safety and Health Resources](#), U.C. Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program
- More Resources from CDPH:
 - [Indoor Air Quality](#), Resources on Ventilation
 - [Get the Most Out of Masking](#)
 - [Guidance on Isolation and Quarantine](#)

Get help:

- **Talk to your union** if you have questions or your school is not doing what is required.
- **Contact LOHP** with your questions: lohp@berkeley.edu
- For safety and health: To report problems or file a complaint, contact your local Cal/OSHA office. You will need the ZIP code for your workplace. To find your local office, go to: <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/complaint.htm> or call Cal/OSHA's Resource Center in English and Spanish during business hours at 833-579-0927.