

MSDH COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for College and University Settings

I. Vaccination

MSDH recommends that all eligible students, faculty, and staff receive COVID-19 vaccination.

Vaccination remains the primary public health prevention strategy to end transmission and allow for safe participation of in-person classes and sponsored activities. Mississippi colleges and universities should continue to promote COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible students, faculty, and staff.

Advantages of having the eligible students, faculty, and staff fully vaccinated (2 weeks after the second dose of vaccine in a 2-dose series, or 2 weeks after a single dose vaccine):

- Keep the learning environment safe for in-person learning.
- Lower the risk of transmission and reduce the severity of illness if infected.
- Limit disruptions to in-person learning and other activities.
- **If exposed to COVID-19, no quarantine is necessary for fully vaccinated individuals** unless symptoms develop, keeping students and staff fully engaged.

II. Universal Indoor Mask Use

Consistent with CDC Public Health Guidance, MSDH directs that masks be worn universally indoors for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. Due to the prevalence of the highly transmissible Delta Variant, masks must be worn in all indoor facilities to mitigate the risk of infection at this time.

Consistent and correct mask use regardless of vaccination status is vital to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors, but masks should be considered in crowded outdoor settings or during activities of close prolonged contact with others.

III. Physical Distancing

MSDH recommends colleges and universities maintain physical distance between students within classroom settings, combined with universal indoor mask wearing, to reduce transmission risk, to the degree practical.

This guidance is made with an understanding of the potential physical constraints and other barriers in classroom settings when providing in-person classes for all students.

IV. Isolation, Contact Tracing, Quarantine, and Identifying Exposed Individuals

MSDH recommends colleges and universities continue to isolate and exclude COVID-19 infected students, faculty, and staff and continue contact tracing to identify exposed individuals for quarantine and exclusion from the school setting.

COVID-19 Infected Individuals and Isolation Period

MSDH recommends individuals who test positive for COVID-19 be excluded from the college setting and remain in Isolation for a full 10 days from the onset of symptoms and are fever free for 24 hours (or excluded for 10 days from the date of the test if asymptomatic).

Asymptomatic individuals with a positive rapid COVID-19 test who have a negative molecular based COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the rapid positive do not require further exclusion and may return to the college setting. This only applies to molecular based tests as the confirmatory testing (i.e., PCR) and does not include antigen test or antibody tests.

Contact Identification (Exposed Individuals)

MSDH recommends colleges and universities continue Contact Tracing to identify all individuals who are in close contact to COVID-19 within the college settings or in other sponsored activities.

COVID-19 Exposure Definition: The current definition of exposure to COVID-19 remains 15 minutes of cumulative contact over a 24-hour period at <6 feet. An infected person can spread COVID-19 up to 2 days before they have symptoms or 2 days prior to positive test if they have no symptoms, therefore, contacts should be identified who were exposed up to 2 days prior to onset or test date accordingly.

Unvaccinated individuals who meet this definition of exposure to COVID-19 should quarantine and get tested 3-5 days after exposure, however, the following exceptions to recommended quarantine apply:

- Fully vaccinated persons in close contact with an infected person do NOT have to quarantine unless they develop symptoms (fully vaccinated persons are recommended to receive COVID-19 testing 3-5 days after exposure to rule out infection).
- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered do not have to quarantine or get tested again as long as they do not develop new symptoms.

Quarantine Period

Students, faculty, and staff who are not fully vaccinated and are identified as close contacts to COVID-19, as outlined above, should be in Quarantine for a full 14 days. There are additional options to the 14-day quarantine period from the school setting as follows:

- 10-day option: Quarantine can end after 10 days if the individual has no symptoms during the entire 10-day period, or
- 7- day plus test option: If the individual has no symptoms for 7 days and has a negative COVID-19 test (molecular or antigen) collected on day 5, 6, or 7 of the quarantine period, the quarantine can be discontinued after day 7.
- Fully vaccinated students, faculty and staff do not require quarantine after contact to an infected person.

V. Exclusion When Sick

All students, faculty, and staff who have symptoms of any infectious illness, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home from school and be evaluated by their healthcare provider.

Students, faculty, and staff should not be allowed to return to college setting until symptom and fever free for at least 24 hours, or if COVID-19 is diagnosed, until the isolation criteria for return has been achieved.

VI. Outbreak Response and Management

What to do in the event of COVID-19 outbreak

Outbreaks represent serious risk to the identified group and the broader community. There are several potential responses to an outbreak that can be taken. When the outbreak threshold* is reached in a defined group, the risk of exposure is significantly raised for the rest of the group; there may be as many unidentified cases already present in the group setting. The best way to prevent further transmission is to isolate those already known to be cases and quarantine those individuals within a group setting to reduce the risk of further spread from as of yet

unrecognized cases. Congregate settings such as dormitories with shared spaces can dramatically increase the risk of transmission. Transmission is more likely between people who live together or share spaces (including bathrooms).

Defining the affected group: All members of a “group**” must be quarantined in the event of an outbreak, unless vaccinated. If there is absolute certainty that a subset of the group has had no contact with a case OR exposure to any of the identified contacts to that case, that subset may be excluded from quarantine precautions.

When an outbreak* is identified in a group** all members of that group must be quarantined:

- For 10 days as outlined above or:
- Until they have a verified negative COVID test (testing may commence at any point after the identification of an outbreak)

All identified direct contacts to a case (as outlined in Section IV above) must complete the full 10-day quarantine period or test negative at day 5,6 or 7 to be released from quarantine after day 7.

**Outbreak* – An outbreak is identified if 3 or more individuals within a group of 30 or less (or 10% or more of larger groups) are diagnosed with COVID within a 14-day period.

***Group* – Collection of individuals in regular contact or proximity when social distancing of 6 feet or greater has not been strictly maintained. Examples might include sports teams, dorm floors, groups of employees working in the same setting, sorority or fraternity houses, shared living environments, clubs and in-person classes. All members of a “group” must be quarantined in the event of an outbreak, unless vaccinated.