

## MI Safe Schools Testing Program: Frequently Asked Questions

On January 8, 2021, the State of Michigan announced a goal for all Pre-K–12 school districts to offer an in-person learning option for students as soon as possible and no later than March 1.

The State of Michigan also released its [Guidelines for Operating Schools Safely](#), summarizing guidance for schools across a range of topics that are relevant to in-person school operations. Along with other mitigation practices, like mask use, social distancing, and frequent cleaning, the Guidelines outline how testing for SARS-COV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can be used as part of a comprehensive strategy to safely return students and staff to in-person learning.

Testing is not a requirement for schools to return to in-person learning. Schools that follow existing guidance carefully and diligently are not considered major risks for outbreaks.

However, testing is one of many tools that, together, can be used to allow for safe in-person instruction.

To support schools that wish to incorporate SARS-COV-2 testing into their plans to resume in-person learning, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is offering a voluntary program to provide rapid antigen testing to educators and staff in Pre-K–12 schools.

### Program Overview

#### **What is the MI Safe Schools testing program?**

The MI Safe Schools testing program is a voluntary program offered by MDHHS for Michigan Pre-K–12 schools who wish to offer weekly testing to educators and staff in order to reduce risk associated with in-person school operations. MDHHS will provide training, guidance, and rapid antigen testing materials to schools who sign up and agree to the program requirements.

#### **Who is eligible for testing?**

Pre-K through grade 12 teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, teaching aides, and non-instructional staff who are working in-person and have daily student interactions are all eligible to participate in this program, through their participating school or district. This program is not intended for colleges, universities, or trade schools.

#### **When will testing be conducted?**

Participating schools will be able to offer testing to student-facing educators and staff on a weekly cadence throughout the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. The exact testing schedule will be set by the participating school or district. MDHHS recommends the participating school pick a day of the week (e.g. Mondays) that testing will be conducted and include whichever participating individuals are in-person that day in the weekly testing.

#### **What is needed for a school to sign up for the program?**

Interested districts should complete the [interest survey](#) and program enrollment materials at [www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting](http://www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting). For the interest survey, districts who would like to participate will be asked to indicate which schools within the district are interested as well as provide a preliminary count of participating educators and staff so that MDHHS can plan to provide sufficient tests. To finalize their enrollment, districts will also be asked to agree to program requirements, solicit consent from participating educators and staff, train appropriate staff to administer the tests, and provide a point of contact for the program. Once enrolled in the program, schools should adhere to a weekly testing cadence and [follow safety protocols for infection control](#) as long as they continue to participate.

### **Why is this program being offered?**

In-person education is critical for students and families. Nothing can replace the value of placing our trained, talented educators in a room with students. Michigan’s educators have worked tirelessly to continue teaching our children during this pandemic under the most stressful conditions, and we owe them our most sincere gratitude.

We also know that many students have struggled with remote learning. Schools also provide other services that students need to thrive—reliable access to the internet, nutritious meals, and mental health supports. Furthermore, many parents need schools open in order to support their families and contribute to our economy.

Schools can be lower-risk environments for students and educators when mitigation strategies are implemented carefully and rigorously. MDHHS is proud to offer assistance to help schools return to (or maintain) safe in-person instruction. [Read more about the rationale behind MI Safe Schools here.](#)

## **Program Logistics**

### **Has the MI Safe Schools testing program already started? Aren’t schools already providing in-person instruction?**

As of December 21, 2020, in-person instruction at Pre-K–12 schools is currently permitted under Michigan state regulations. However, reopening decisions are made locally, and not all Michigan schools have returned to in-person instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. Schools who wish to participate in this program may indicate their interest and begin the enrollment process at [www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting](http://www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting). Enrollment in the program will be on a rolling basis. MDHHS anticipates that the first schools will be able to begin their testing cadence the week of February 1.

### **What happens after a district expresses interest in participating?**

Once a district has taken the first step by completing the [interest survey](#), they can begin the enrollment process. Interested districts can find enrollment materials at [www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting](http://www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting).

To finalize enrollment, districts will need to solicit consent from participating staff, train appropriate staff to administer the tests, agree to program requirements, and provide a point of contact for the program. Nonpublic schools will also need to obtain a [Federal Certification for Clinical Laboratory \(CLIA\) waiver](#) to perform rapid tests on site. Districts who have completed all the steps necessary to enroll can submit their final enrollment and first order for test supplies using the link available at [www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting](http://www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting).

### **Who is paying for this?**

MDHHS is providing test supplies to schools at no cost. Any staff time, personal protective equipment, or other costs to run the program are the responsibility of the school or district.

### **I know that testing alone is not enough to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in schools. What else should schools be doing to keep students and staff healthy?**

Testing to diagnose COVID-19 is only one potential piece of a school's comprehensive strategy to fight the spread of COVID-19. Other important strategies include:

- Promoting behaviors that reduce spread (e.g. mask use, social distancing, hand hygiene)
- Maintaining healthy environments (e.g. frequent cleaning and disinfecting, ventilation)
- Managing school operations (e.g. class sizes)
- Preparing for when someone gets sick

More details and strategies to keep students and staff safe can be found [here](#) (MDHHS) and [here](#) (CDC).

### **What other support is the State of Michigan providing for return to in-person learning?**

Besides supporting the MI Safe Start testing program, the State of Michigan has:

- Released updated guidance
- Issued MIOSHA emergency rules to ensure worker protections: the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) offers workplace safety guidance and protections that extend to schools
- Prioritized Michigan teachers and school staff as "frontline essential workers" who are now eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations
- MDHHS and many local health departments also offer free resources for staff and students who either test positive or are close contacts of those who test positive
- Significant federal resources to provide emergency relief assistance for schools to enable in-person learning

## **Participants**

### **Are students included in this program?**

This program is intended for teachers and staff who have daily interaction with students. However, additional pilot programs may also be offered to school districts that are interested in a limited amount of student testing for the purposes of surveillance. If you are interested in

including students in your testing protocols, please submit an email to [MDHHS-Binaxnowrequest@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-Binaxnowrequest@michigan.gov).

**Do all educators and staff at a school have to participate in the program? Can participants get tested on their own?**

No, all staff members do not have to participate in the program. For schools that are participating, MDHHS recommends tests be used for educators and staff who are attending work in-person and have frequent, daily interactions with students. Staff who are working from home or do not have daily interactions with students may not participate. There is no minimum required number of educators and staff for a school to offer this program. Participants who get rapid testing on their own are not considered participating in the program.

**I am considered at high risk for COVID-19. Do I have to participate in the program?**

We understand that educators and staff who meet the [CDC definition of high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#) may not feel comfortable participating in in-school instruction. If you feel that you meet this definition, you should work with your school to see what accommodations may be available to you. Educators and staff are not obligated to participate in the testing program.

**Should participants who have already had COVID-19 but recovered still participate in testing?**

If the participant has recovered from COVID-19 within the last 90 days (with a confirmed diagnostic test), regular testing is not recommended. Other requirements, such as wearing a mask when around others, still apply. Testing is still recommended for individuals who have had COVID-19 more than 90 days ago. Any participant that displays COVID-19 symptoms at any time, regardless of prior COVID-19 diagnosis, must stay home and self-isolate in accordance with [CDC guidance](#).

**I have already received a vaccine for COVID-19. Is testing still necessary?**

Once an individual has received both doses of an approved vaccine for COVID-19, they may elect to stop participating in the program. The likelihood of developing COVID-19 infection after vaccination is very low, but not zero.

## Testing Protocol

**How will testing work?**

Trained school personnel will administer the tests on-site at school, using point of care (rapid) antigen tests. Individuals receiving the test will be able to use nasal swabs to swab their own nostrils to provide samples.

**What kind of tests will be used?**

All program participants will use antigen tests. Antigen tests are commonly used in the diagnosis of respiratory pathogens. They detect the presence of a specific viral antigen, which implies that the individual currently has a viral infection. The FDA has granted emergency use

authorization for antigen tests that can identify SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Antigen tests for SARS-CoV-2 can be performed without special equipment and can be administered by trained school staff. More information on antigen tests is available [here](#) (MDHHS) and [here](#) (CDC).

#### **How frequently will testing occur?**

MDHHS will provide antigen tests to allow for weekly testing for all participants, as long as the participant's school continues to take part in the program. The testing cadence will begin after staff are trained and supplies are secured.

#### **How will schools get access to tests?**

Once a school is enrolled, in most cases, MDHHS will ship kits to the district's intermediate school district. The school district will acquire the testing supplies from the ISD and then will allocate tests to the participating schools. Schools will store and administer tests on site.

#### **How can schools get access to additional personal protective equipment (PPE) for testing?**

Schools can [contact their local emergency management program](#) if they need assistance obtaining additional PPE for testing. Schools can also request PPE for donation or purchase at discounted rates [here](#).

#### **Who is responsible for administering the rapid tests and how will they be trained?**

Anyone who is trained can administer these tests. Staff who are administering the tests must complete two online training videos [here](#) and [here](#).

#### **What happens if someone tests positive?**

The person is immediately sent home and should get a PCR or molecular test to confirm their test result. A PCR test is a lab-based, diagnostic test for SARS-CoV-2 detection. PCR tests detect genetic material that is specific to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and can detect the virus within days of infection, even those who have no symptoms. Individuals can find a PCR testing location near them at [www.Michigan.gov/coronavirustest](http://www.Michigan.gov/coronavirustest). If the person can show proof of a negative PCR test taken within 48 hours after the positive antigen test, they may return to work. If they have a positive PCR test or do not obtain a test within 48 hours, they may not return to work for 10 days.

**What if that person later tests negative with a lab-based test? What happens if someone is told they were a close contact of someone with COVID-19 and has to quarantine, but they have had a negative antigen test?**

Scenario (teacher or other staff member)	May not return to in-person work until:
<b>Asymptomatic close contact of a person with COVID-19</b>	Local or State Health Department quarantine requirements have been met (usually 10-14 days).
<b>Symptoms including fever, cough, other respiratory symptoms, or those symptoms <a href="#">outlined by the CDC</a></b>	Symptoms have resolved for more than 24 hours and the person has a negative <b>molecular (PCR)</b> (not antigen) test
<b>Asymptomatic, with positive antigen test</b>	The person may resume in-person work if they have a subsequent negative molecular test within 48 hrs. Otherwise, isolate for 10 days from date of first positive test, or as per CDC guidelines
<b>Asymptomatic, with positive PCR (molecular) test</b>	Isolate for 10 days from date of first positive test, or as per CDC guidelines

Staff with symptoms or a positive antigen test result should receive a molecular (PCR) test immediately.

**What happens to a class if an instructor has a positive antigen test?**

Any [close contacts](#) of the instructor will need to quarantine as if the person is positive, unless and until the person obtains a negative PCR test result. If a program participant does test positive, that person must cooperate with contact tracing, and any others who have had close contact will need to quarantine (per the table above).

## Reporting Protocol

**How are test results reported?**

All tests conducted for COVID-19 must be reported to MDHHS. All positive and negative tests conducted at the school must be reported. [All antigen test results should be reported at this link.](#)

**If an individual tests positive, who are schools required to notify?**

All tests results must be reported to MDHHS. The school must also notify the local health department of any positive results. The result is also counted as a probable case for school mandated public reporting. [More information on notification requirements and privacy considerations under state and federal law can be found here.](#)

### **Is this program HIPAA-compliant? How will participant privacy be protected?**

Schools will be entering test results directly into a portal for the Michigan Disease Surveillance System, the state's system for reporting communicable diseases. Results will only be used for public health monitoring purposes, not sold or shared with law enforcement agencies. This process does not, on its own, create FERPA- or HIPAA-covered records. Reporting these data is a public health activity, and HIPAA restrictions do not apply.

If the school creates its own paper copies of records, then those could potentially be HIPAA-covered depending on who creates the record. MDHHS has supplied [a template consent form](#) for schools to build upon based on their own needs and processes for this pilot. If a school creates its own process or forms, then that school should consult its own lawyers about compliance with relevant privacy laws. Participating schools should have a plan in place to securely retain any records developed for this program, in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws, and provide them to MDHHS upon request at any time.

## **Program Oversight and Additional Resources**

### **How is this program being monitored?**

Participating schools must document their compliance with all requirements and submit that plan to their school district. These plans must be made available to MDHHS or local health departments upon request.

### **Where can I find more information?**

Interested districts are invited to attend or view MDHHS's series of webinars outlining further details and next steps:

**January 14, 2021 (10-11 am):** Teams Live Event: Introductory Webinar

**January 19, 2021 (2-3 pm):** Teams Live Event: Completing Enrollment Materials

**January 20, 2021 (2-3 pm):** Teams Live Event: BinaxNOW Training

**January 22, 2021 (9-10 am):** MDHHS Office Hours

**January 25, 2021 (2-3 pm):** Teams Live Event: Reporting and Reordering Tests

**January 29, 2021 (9-10 am):** MDHHS Office Hours

Find links to or recordings of these sessions at [www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting](http://www.Michigan.gov/schoolcovidtesting).

### **Who can I contact if I have additional questions?**

Please send an email to [MDHHS-Binaxnowrequest@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-Binaxnowrequest@michigan.gov).