

NEW GUIDANCE EMPHASIZES IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL AND LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION

New [guidance](#) issued this week by the Illinois Department of Public Health (“IDPH”) provides clarity on the role local health departments play in helping schools combat the spread of COVID-19 as they return to hybrid or full in-person instruction. While school districts should maintain consistent and open communication with their local health departments, here are a few key issues highlighted in the recent guidance:

- A new [decision tree](#) indicates that schools should require documentation from the Local Health Department or healthcare providers before permitting employees or students to return to school in the following situations:
 1. When a person has isolated because he or she previously tested positive for COVID-19, or was diagnosed with COVID-19 without diagnostic testing, the school should obtain a “release from isolation” letter issued by the Local Health Department to the sick individual;
 2. When a person has COVID-19-related symptoms, but obtains a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test, the school should obtain a copy of the negative test or a health care provider’s note indicating that the test was negative;
 3. When a symptomatic person obtains an alternative diagnosis, but does not get a negative COVID-19 test, the school should obtain a healthcare provider’s note with the alternative diagnosis
 4. When a person stays home due to COVID-19 symptoms, but does not get a COVID-19 test or an alternative diagnosis, the school should obtain a note from the employee or parent/guardian of the student indicating that the sick individual has been fever-free without fever-reducing medication for at least 24 hours and that other symptoms have improved.
 5. When an asymptomatic person has quarantined because he or she was a “close contact” to a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case, the school should obtain a “release from quarantine” letter issued by the Local Health Department to the sick individual.

Please note that, in addition to obtaining the above documents, school districts should continue to require that people who have confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 must meet the following time-based requirements before returning to school: (1) at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms; (2) at least 24 hours fever-free without fever-reducing medication; and (3) improvement of other symptoms.

- Schools should send an immediate written notification to the Local Health Department when a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 or becomes sick with

COVID-19 symptoms. Schools should share all available information about the case's movements and potential exposures within the facility.

- The Local Health Department will contact the COVID-positive individual to perform contact tracing. School districts should aid this process by providing the Local Health Department with attendance records, classroom schedules, seating charts, transportation schedules, and staff assignments to help identify close contacts.
- If a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been within school during the 48 hours prior to symptom onset (for a symptomatic person) or 48 hours before specimen collection (for an asymptomatic person), the school may be closed temporarily for cleaning and disinfection. When school closure is warranted will be determined through a Local Health Department investigation.
- If an outbreak occurs (e.g., at least 2 cases within 14 days in the same classroom), the Local Health Department will investigate to determine the extent of exposure at the school and what control measures (ranging from increased social distancing procedures to school closure) are warranted.

Our office will continue to provide updates as more information becomes available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact one of our attorneys.