



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences
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TO: Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care Providers

FROM: Larry Madoff, MD, Medical Director
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DATE: November 25, 2020

RE: Pediatric and Adolescent COVID-19 Testing Guidance

The purpose of this Clinical Advisory is to remind providers that COVID-19 testing is strongly recommended for all patients who present with any symptom consistent with COVID-19, regardless of age. Initiatives to contain the spread of COVID-19 will not be successful in Massachusetts without rapid ascertainment of COVID-19, isolation of infected individuals of all ages, and subsequent quarantine of close contacts to individuals with COVID-19.

Background

- Significant increases in the number of COVID-19 cases have been reported in those 0 – 19 years of age in Massachusetts.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 in children and adolescents overlap with symptoms of other infections and noninfectious processes, making it impossible to distinguish COVID-19 infections without testing.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 in children and adolescents are often mild, making it impossible to distinguish COVID-19 infections without testing.
- Pediatric and adolescent patients with COVID-19 can also be infected with SARS-CoV-2 concomitantly with other pathogens.
- Reports of variance in clinical practice related to COVID-19 testing of pediatric patients have been received by the Department of Public Health.
- Schools and child cares are not generally allowing students who had symptoms consistent with COVID-19 back to school without a negative test.

Current Guidance from the Department of Public Health, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Department of Early Education and Care:

Symptoms consistent with COVID-19

- Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Headache when in combination with other symptoms
- Muscle aches or body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) when in combination with other symptoms

In order to protect children and staff attending school and child care from the introduction of COVID-19, testing of symptomatic individuals must be the default practice. Students with acute onset of new symptoms (especially respiratory symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath, sore throat) or fever should almost always receive a negative molecular (e.g., PCR) COVID test before returning to school. Health care providers have clinical discretion to consider chronic illnesses or symptoms such as headache and abdominal or gastrointestinal symptoms and use clinical judgment to defer testing when an alternative cause is firmly established, however, this should be the rare exception.

If a student has a chronic illness or symptom that is consistent with COVID-19, the health care provider, family and school or child care provider should agree on a testing protocol for that child. The testing protocol should take into consideration what is known about the student's condition and identify, to the extent possible, clear guidelines for when testing is recommended. The presence or absence of fever should not be the sole indicator of whether testing is warranted.

Summary

Massachusetts Department of Public Health continues to recommend that molecular (e.g., PCR) testing, using an FDA-approved assay to detect the presence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, should be performed in *all* patients with symptoms compatible with COVID, and in *all* close contacts to COVID-positive individuals during the infectious period.

Please contact MDPH at 617-983-6800 or DESE at reopeningk12@mass.gov for further questions.

Resources

[Massachusetts COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) COVID-19: Information for Pediatric Healthcare Providers Website](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics: COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#)