



Recommendations for Pooled Screening Testing in K-12 Schools

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Screening testing can be an effective strategy for K-12 schools to identify asymptomatic cases and prevent secondary transmission. Screening testing involves using SARS-CoV-2 viral tests (diagnostic tests used for screening purposes) to identify persons with COVID-19 even if there is no reason to suspect infection—i.e., there is no known exposure and no symptoms. Screening testing is particularly valuable in areas with moderate and high levels of community transmission.

Schools may consider using [pooled testing](#) as a screening testing strategy for students. Pooled testing involves mixing several samples from different individuals together in a “batch” or pooled sample, then testing the pooled sample with a diagnostic test. This approach increases the number of individuals that can be tested and reduces the need for testing resources. This approach may be particularly helpful in schools using cohorts. **Because of the complexities of acting on a positive result, pooled testing is best used in situations where the number of positives is expected to be very low.**

NJDOH strongly recommends that schools considering pooled testing ensure that the performing laboratory can test to the individual level should the pool be positive BEFORE contracting with that laboratory for screening testing services.

COVID-19 assays and test systems used for diagnostic or screening testing, including those used for pooling, must have received an EUA from FDA. Laboratories that conduct diagnostic or screening testing for COVID-19 must also comply with Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) regulations. A CLIA-certified laboratory that allows for pooling must report diagnostic or screening negative test results to the participants in the pool according to the instructions for use of the FDA-authorized SARS-CoV-2 in vitro diagnostic device that the laboratory used. The CLIA-certified laboratory must also report those diagnostic or screening negative test results to the local, state, tribal, or territory health department.

The CLIA-certified laboratory should not report positive or indeterminate results of a pooled test to either the participants in the pool, or the local health department. All participant specimens that were in a pooled test with a positive or indeterminate result should be retested separately, and the subsequent individual diagnostic or screening results must be reported to the local health department.

For schools that elect to use pooled testing for screening, [CDC recommendations](#) for the implementation and interpretation of pooled testing should be followed.

- If a pool tests negative, each individual within the pool should be reported to public health agencies as negative.
- If a pool tests positive, the diagnostic laboratory must perform **diagnostic testing of every individual in the pool** and report individual test results to public health.

In addition to reporting to the local health department, school staff must report follow-up test results to the individual who was tested or, if the individual is a student, to the person who consented to the testing (i.e., the student’s parent/guardian).

If a laboratory reports a positive pool result (**not recommended and not in compliance with CDC recommendations**), the entire pool of students must be excluded from school as if all are positive for COVID-19. In this scenario, many students would be excluded unnecessarily from school and limited public health and school health resources will be spent in on investigation and contact tracing on some individuals that do not have COVID-19.

All SARS-CoV-2 test results must be reported to public health agencies. While other reporting mechanisms may become available, currently any facility that conducts school-based testing will need to have access to the NJDOH [Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System](#) (CDRSS) to report test results. The Quick Start Option for COVID-19 Training can be found on the CDRSS home page (available at: <https://cdrs.doh.state.nj.us/cdrss/login/loginPage/>).

While schools are waiting for access to CDRSS, results can be [reported to the local health department](#).

In addition to reporting individual test results, schools who are conducting screening testing are asked to report aggregate weekly data to NJDOH through the CDRSS School Surveillance Module. Schools who are not currently reporting weekly surveillance data into CDRSS should go to the [CDRSS home page](#) under "System Announcements" scroll down to the K-12 SIC Module Enrollment and Training. After watching the SIC module training video sending a completing [User Agreement](#) to CDS.COV.RPT@doh.nj.gov users will be provided access.

References and Resources:

- CDC Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>
- CDC Interim Guidance for Use of Pooling Procedures: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/pooling-procedures.html>
- NJDOH CALI Report: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/>