



NEWS RELEASE

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Illinois Department of Public Health Expands Free COVID-19 Testing to All K-12 Public Schools in Illinois

Testing can help keep kids in school for in-person learning

SPRINGFIELD – To help ensure schools can more safely resume in-person learning, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) today announced it is expanding access to free COVID-19 testing to all K-12 public schools across Illinois outside of Chicago which received its own federal funding. Schools can choose to utilize the SHIELD Illinois saliva-based test developed by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), which is able to detect SARS-CoV-2 and its variants in symptomatic, pre-symptomatic, and asymptomatic individuals.

“In-person learning is a priority and we want to make sure students, teachers, and staff are able to return to the classroom as safely as possible,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “With the surge in COVID-19 cases and Delta variant, the sooner we know if someone has been infected, the quicker we can take action to prevent the spread of the virus to others. Not only is testing the best way to identify these cases, it can also help keep kids in school with a new Test-to-Stay protocol. We encourage all school districts to take advantage of this free resource.”

As an alternative to quarantine, students and teachers who have been identified as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case now have the option of a Test-to-Stay protocol. Close contacts must be tested on days 1, 3, 5, and 7 after exposure. As long as close contacts remain negative, they are not required to quarantine. Close contacts are only eligible for Test-to-Stay if their school requires universal indoor masking of all individuals (age 2 and older), regardless of vaccination status, and both the close contact and infected individual were wearing masks at the time of exposure. IDPH encourages all schools to implement weekly testing of their unvaccinated students and staff. Schools that implement weekly testing will be prioritized for Test-to-Stay and outbreak testing when required.

Previously, SHIELD Illinois tests were offered to schools in predominantly low-income communities that have experienced high rates of COVID-19 infection at no-cost. Thanks to additional funding from the federal CARES Act and American Rescue Plan, IDPH has the ability to expand free testing to all K-12 schools outside of Chicago. The classification of low-income school districts is determined by the Illinois State Board of Education’s [evidence-based funding criteria](#).

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“From the onset of the pandemic, the University of Illinois System has been committed to helping the state and its people navigate and safely emerge from this crisis,” U of I System President Tim Killeen said. “The decision by IDPH to provide our test-and-trace system at no cost to many thousands of K-12 students will allow a return to in-person learning and the kinds of educational opportunities for these young people that mean a better tomorrow for us all. We are grateful to state health officials for their leadership through this difficult time, and their ongoing partnership with the U of I System.”

Schools looking for more information on testing or to sign up for SHIELD Illinois testing can contact Beth Heller at bheller@uillinois.edu.

(For your use is [a video](#) showing two ways that schools are collecting saliva samples and a [still photo](#).)

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