

**COUNTY OF LAKE**  
Health Services Department  
Public Health Division  
922 Bevins Court  
Lakeport, California 95453-9739  
Telephone 707/263-1090  
FAX 707/263-4395



Carol J. Huchingson  
*Interim Health Services Director*

Gary Pace, MD, MPH  
*Public Health Officer*

Eileen VanCleave  
*Public Health Nursing Director*

Iyesha Miller  
*Public Health Program Manager*

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**Contact: MHOAC Team**  
707-263-8174

## **COVID-19 Update: Keeping Schools Open During the Omicron Surge** *An urgent and important message from Gary Pace, MD, MPH*

**Lake County, CA (January 6, 2022)** — Documented COVID-19 cases are now rapidly climbing in Lake County, as has recently been the case around the state. With classrooms reopening after the holiday break, outbreaks have occurred among students and staff at local schools.

We at Public Health want to encourage flexibility and understanding at this very challenging moment. Our aim is to help the schools stay open, while keeping students and staff as safe as possible.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) have recommendations that guide isolation of positive cases and quarantine of close contacts (*see below*). With Omicron spreading through communities, we are better understanding how the variant behaves, and how vaccination status affects transmission. Guidance has been rapidly evolving, as a result.

This update seeks to dispel confusion, and ensure you have access to current resources.

**Isolation for students** (*i.e., when a student has been infected with the virus, even if they don't have symptoms*): As has always been the case, CDPH's K-12 Schools guidance (in Section 10) recommends individuals follow general CDPH guidance regarding isolation. Therefore, for "Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, previous infection or lack of symptoms... Isolation can end after day 5 if symptoms are not present or are resolving and a diagnostic specimen collected on day 5 or later tests negative." See the general guidance for more:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Guidance-on-Isolation-and-Quarantine-for-COVID-19-Contact-Tracing.aspx>

**Quarantine for students** (*i.e., when a student might have been exposed to the virus and may or may not be infected*): The current CDPH K-12 guidance regarding modified and standard quarantines remains unchanged at this time. Here is the most current guidance document:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/K-12-Guidance-2021-22-School-Year.aspx>

That said, CDPH is actively reviewing new CDC guidance (issued on Jan 4, 2021) and they hope to provide updates soon:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s1227-isolation-quarantine-guidance.html>

**Staff:** As has been the case, employers are subject to the Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS), but Executive Order N-84-20 is still active. Currently, these guidelines for staff are different than for students. It is our understanding Cal/OSHA will soon provide additional clarifications via a new statement.

<https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/coronavirus/ETS.html>

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/12.14.20-EO-N-84-20-COVID-19.pdf>

## **What Can You Do to Keep Schools Open and Our Kids and Communities Safe?**

Throughout this surge, let's keep the schools open and our kids and staff as safe as possible:

- **Vaccination:** This may be the most important step to take. Everyone who is eligible should get vaccinated and boosted. While vaccinated people can still catch and spread the virus, the contagious period is shorter for vaccinated folks, and the vaccine definitely makes it less likely someone will enter the hospital or die.
- **Testing:** There is an important role for testing, and we encourage testing when symptomatic or after close contact. If a student is positive, they should isolate per the guidelines. Antigen testing for symptomatic students can usually be accessed at schools.
- **Isolation and Quarantine:** We are encouraging schools to follow the Isolation and Quarantine guidelines previously discussed.

Visit <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Coronavirus/Vaccines.htm> and <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Coronavirus/Testing.htm> to learn more about vaccination and testing resources available in Lake County.

## **Do You Have Concerns?**

- If you have a specific concern about management of a situation, go through your school's feedback channels.
- If you are not comfortable with the situation and precautions at your child's school for in-person learning, consult with the school about other options.

## **Is it Likely Schools Will Close Down Again?**

Lake County Health Services' Public Health Division has no plans to order schools to shut down to prevent spread of the virus. However, some sites may be very challenged by staffing shortages, and may have to adapt.

Local school staff and administrators are working extremely hard to educate our kids and try to keep them safe. In this rapidly-changing environment, they are being handed an almost impossible task.

You can help by following the above recommendations regarding vaccination, testing, isolation and quarantine.

We are hoping this surge will only last a month or so. Please take steps to keep your children safe, and the schools open.

Gary Pace, MD, MPH