



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

January 12, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your continued dedication to keeping schools safe for students and staff so they can remain open for in-person learning. We know that children learn best in the classroom, and while the past two years – and especially these past few months and weeks – have been trying, your efforts have been nothing short of heroic.

**I'm writing to share new and existing resources from the federal government that can help you access tests and implement testing programs in your schools.**

As we experience another surge in COVID-19 cases, we're fortunate to be able to build on the knowledge we've gained and the latest science to keep students, staff, and school communities safe. [As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) has stated](#), multiple studies have shown that transmission within school settings is typically lower than or similar to levels of community transmission when prevention strategies are in place in schools. When there are higher levels of community transmission, it is particularly important to strengthen strategies for preventing COVID-19 spread in school, like hosting vaccination clinics, implementing testing programs like Test to Stay for unvaccinated individuals, and always wearing a mask in school.

Many of you have reached out recently to share concerns about access to tests, and we have heard your concerns. Today, the Biden-Harris Administration announced new action to increase access to COVID-19 testing in schools. Through these new initiatives, the Administration will increase the number of COVID-19 tests available to schools by 10 million a month. This additional testing capacity will help schools safely remain open and allow them to implement screening testing and [Test to Stay programs](#) through both antigen and lab-based tests.

Below, please find four resources you can use to bring COVID-19 testing to your schools:

1. [Use your state's COVID-19 testing program\(s\) and resources, funded by the CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity \(ELC\) program](#): The CDC awarded \$10 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to the ELC program to help states and schools stand-up COVID-19 testing programs. About three quarters of recipients set up centralized contracts with COVID-19 testing providers. While programs vary by state, these arrangements allow schools to access testing resources quickly and coordinate with statewide activities, including accessing test supply and administration. Schools should review state offerings and reach out to their state to tap into ELC-funded testing providers, programs, and resources by visiting the [CDC ELC webpage](#). In addition to the COVID-19 testing the \$10 billion investment has generated, the Administration has also announced the availability of 5 million point-of-care, rapid antigen tests each month for school-based testing programs – which will be distributed through state ELC grant recipients. States can request these tests on behalf of high-need districts in their state, with prioritization for schools that can put these point-of-care tests to immediate use. To learn more about and access your state's testing resources, and to inquire with your state about the availability of additional antigen tests for schools, please visit the [CDC ELC webpage](#) of state ELC school testing contacts.

2. Access free lab-based testing through the CDC Operation Expanded Testing (OpET) program: The Administration announced this week availability of **an additional 5 million lab-based tests from schools each month** through the [Operation Expanded Testing \(OpET\) program](#). The OpET program increases access to lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing nationwide for K-12 schools, child care centers, and other settings. Four regional hubs provide sample collection supplies, shipping costs and shipping materials needed to send specimens to the laboratory, laboratory testing, and results reporting at no direct cost to recipients. Districts across the country have been successfully using the OpET program since its launch last spring. This program may be particularly useful for those schools where staff are already conducting sample collection.
  - Schools can reach out to request these tests right away by visiting [Operation Expanded Testing | CDC](#) or by contacting your regional hub through the websites below. If you have any questions about OpET and how this resource may be able to fit into your overall testing plan, please contact [eocevent589@cdc.gov](mailto:eocevent589@cdc.gov).
    - Northeast and South: <http://www.operationet.com/>
    - Midwest: <https://testedandprotected.org/#/>
    - West: <https://letsendthistogether.com/>
3. Connect with school COVID-19 testing vendors – and use your ESSER funds to set up a testing program at your school: States and school districts received \$122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds under the American Rescue Plan Act, which may be used to arrange for testing and testing-related services alongside other important mitigation strategies. In addition to the free and low-cost options listed above from your state and the federal government, we encourage you to explore options with testing providers in your state, using your ESSER dollars. You can learn more about available providers and how to set up school-based testing programs by using the Rockefeller Foundation’s one-pager [testing how-to start-up guide](#). An additional resource to explore test provider options and considerations is available at <https://www.openandsafeschools.org/partners>.
4. Partner with a community COVID-19 testing site near your school that your students and staff can use: Schools may consider referring students, teachers, and staff to community-based testing sites. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has partnered with pharmacies and retail companies to provide testing for more Americans in communities across the country. Additionally, the federal government is working with state, territory, and tribal partners to establish free, convenient testing sites in the hardest-hit and highest-risk communities. State leaders can incorporate school testing into community-based testing sites, including by locating testing sites on or near school grounds and establishing specific operating hours for schools. To learn more, visit <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/community-based-testing-sites/index.html>.

You can find additional reminders about how to structure testing programs in schools – like screening testing or Test to Stay – at [Open and Safe Schools](#).

**As a reminder, vaccinations continue to be our best defense to keep our students and staff safe from COVID-19.** School leaders play an important role when it comes to vaccines: according to a [Kaiser Family Foundation poll](#), parents are approximately twice as likely to get their child vaccinated if their school

provides information about the vaccine. Students ages 5 and up are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. We encourage you to provide access to COVID-19 vaccines at schools by setting up school-located clinics. You can learn more about how to set up school-located COVID-19 vaccine clinics by visiting [Letter on Covid-19 vaccination for children from Becerra and Cardona - HHS Secretary and Education Secretary](#).

Everyone eligible for a booster shot should also get one right away – this includes our educators and school staff. Boosters provide an improved level of protection against COVID-19. We know that vaccines remain effective in preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death. As we continue to work to stay ahead of the virus, the best thing your school staff can do right now is to get the booster shot today. Boosters and vaccines are free and readily available at more than 80,000 locations coast to coast. Your school staff can find one by visiting [vaccines.gov](#), texting their ZIP code to 438829, or calling 1-800-232-0233, or you can offer them to students, staff, and families through school-located vaccine clinics.

**Being fully vaccinated is the best way to stay in school in-person.** Students, teachers, and staff who are [up to date](#) with their COVID-19 vaccines or had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days do not need to quarantine if they are exposed. They should wear a [well-fitting mask](#) around others and watch for symptoms for 10 days.

We're two years into the pandemic, and we've come a long way, thanks to your unwavering commitment to students, school staff, and safety. The Department will continue to be a support and service agency, providing resources, advocating on your behalf, and helping schools maintain a safe environment for students and staff to be in-person.

Thank you for everything you've done and all that you're doing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Miguel A. Cardona. Ed. D.  
U.S. Secretary of Education