

COVID TA+ Back to School Issues FAQ

A Tentative COVID Safety Agreement overview and 8/18/22 webinar recording are available on the Memberlink Portal at members.ctulocal1.org along with this FAQ.

COVID Tentative Agreement Related Questions

1. What does this new COVID Safety TA preserve from our previous MOU?

The new COVID Safety TA preserves a district-wide weekly COVID screening testing, contact tracing and school-based contact tracing teams, CPS providing masks, the existence and powers of building-level and District level Safety Committees, paid voluntary phone banking and paid COVID captains, CPS maintaining vaccination sites and events, ventilation mandates, filters and indoor air quality meters at schools, enhanced cleaning, CPS providing wipes, sanitizer, and sneeze guards, incentives for substitute teachers (for the whole school year), thresholds for safety committee to vote on school-wide flip to remote, and unpaid leave for those at most risk.

The new COVID Safety TA goes well beyond Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations announced on [August 11, 2022](#), particularly in the areas of COVID screening testing in schools, contact tracing, and district provided vaccination opportunities.

2. What changes with this new COVID Safety TA? What is added?

The new COVID Safety TA outlines new regional cadre substitute teacher positions that will be assigned coverage by networks, and high needs networks will be prioritized. Regional cadre in these positions with education degrees will be paid at the same rate for displaced TAT cadre. And regional cadre who cover the same vacant position for 20 consecutive school days, who are qualified to fill the vacant position, and who submit an application for the vacant position, must be granted an interview to potentially fill the vacant position.

Additionally, the new COVID TA provides new capabilities to the District Safety Committee. In addition to the oversight that the committee had last year from our January 2022, (meeting weekly to resolve issues and monitor compliance with safety protocols), with this TA, the District Safety Committee may also:

- Work to increase families signing their students up for weekly COVID screening testing.
- Support to create school-based contact tracing teams at schools that don't have one and to review the efficacy of the contact tracing generally.

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- Work with CPS' COVID testing vendor to set up testing schedules at schools that don't have testing two weeks in a row and CPS must provide the District Safety Committee with that information.
- Determine a list of strategies, learned from schools last year, on how to do social distancing effectively.
- Explicit authority to address schools where there are issues with mask availability from CPS or issues with air purifiers (including filter replacement). The committee did some of this last year, but now its explicitly enumerated in the TA to ensure it happens more often.

3. What changes with this new COVID Safety TA? What is not included?

Referenced above, on August 11, 2022, the CDC announced major changes to their recommendations for COVID safety in schools. They no longer recommend quarantine of asymptomatic close contacts and our previous COVID MOUs gave deference to public health guidance and agencies. CPS and CDPH are following CDCs recommendation that asymptomatic close contacts no longer quarantine for this school year.

Asymptomatic close contacts are encouraged to test and CPS will provide rapid tests and they must mask for at least 10 days after the date of exposure to an individual who tests positive for COVID. Close contacts should still receive notifications as a result of contact tracing so they know to mask for 10 days. Individuals who test positive must still isolate for at least 5 days, and if they are well enough to return on day 6, they must mask from day 6 through day 10. Building-level Safety Committees should work to ensure that the school is enforcing this masking policy and issues can be [reported](#) to the [District Safety committee](#) for assistance.

Additionally, this means that in CPS schools where individual families signed up their students to participate in the Test to Stay pilot, tests on day three and five are not required by close contacts, but CPS will still provide rapid tests and encourage close contacts to test on those days after exposure. This CDC change also means that principals will not truly be able to flip individual classrooms to remote learning.

Additionally, with CPS' new test to stay guidelines, if there are more than 3 confirmed cases in a classroom, the CDPH will conduct an enhanced contact

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tracing program to identify close contacts, distribute rapid tests, and quarantine any additionally identified cases.

Although we succeeded in preserving other substitute teacher incentives, CPS refused to maintain one program that CTU supported: CPS would not retain the \$30/day incentive which was applied to all substitute teachers for the entire school year. This incentive was in effect for a single month of last school year (January 2022). It is our understanding that CPS will retain the incentive for the start of the school year, but, despite the substitute teacher crisis, would not commit to applying the incentive beyond the first three weeks of the school year.

The previous agreements maintained the goal of 6 feet of social distancing when possible, which was not particularly possible in many schools. This agreement allows the District Safety Committee to develop and share strategies for distancing.

4. With so much changing in terms of how COVID safety is perceived, why is the safety committee still important?

This new COVID TA preserves many key COVID safety protocols and the building-level safety committees remain a critical mechanism to enforce the agreement and protocols.

We know safety committees are a lot of work but we don't know how the new changes in CDC guidance will work in our schools. We believe we need to maintain the protocols that this new agreement offers, therefore, we need safety committees to monitor the remaining protocols. These committees can serve as a critical tool in keeping school communities safe as the pandemic and other health threats continue to change and present new challenges.

Safety committees can work to make sure that schools receive and distribute sanitizer, wipes, masks, that schools maintain sneeze guards in the main office, that clinicians have their specialized PPE, that enhancing cleaning is occurring, request indoor air quality checks, ensure maintenance of air purifiers and filters, monitor implementation of weekly COVID screening testing and availability and distribution of rapid tests to close contacts, helping volunteer COVID Captains and phone bankers increase testing sign-ups and sharing vaccination information (making sure information in English and Spanish, advocating for other languages), ensure close contact notifications and masking are occurring, getting updates from the school-based contact tracing team and if necessary (we hope

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not) voting on full-school flip to remote if the thresholds are met (which is harder now that close contacts are not required to quarantine).

5. What happens if CPS does what they did with masking last year and violate our agreement?

The Unfair Labor Practice charge that the CTU filed over CPS's violation of the masking provision of our safety agreement last year went to trial this past spring. The case is pending before an administrative law judge and we expect a decision in the coming months. A favorable decision in that case will aid in our ability to win injunctive relief in the future if CPS tries to walk away from clear contractual commitments.

6. What will we need to do to ensure this TA works for us in our schools if approved?

We will have to maintain active safety committees, paid phone banking and captains to sign up families again for testing. It's important to press administration to align with this messaging, help us with communicating to parents and students the importance of the continued testing, and share new information about the test to stay program, where applicable.

Other COVID Related Questions

7. Do we still get COVID sick days this SY 22-23? What's the status of the governor's order on this?

Every 30 days, the governor reaffirms the COVID emergency protocols for the state. Once that emergency designation is lifted, the COVID sick day replacement legislation would be moot. Currently, that is not the case, and the same eligibility requirements from the 2021-2022 school year remain in place for the 2022-2023 school year.

Members who are symptomatic but test negative for COVID are encouraged to use sick days and continue to monitor as sometimes individuals test positive thereafter.

8. Are schools still required to have Care Rooms? I'm hearing principals were given a choice?

We received reports from schools where administrators were saying there would no longer be care rooms and we followed up with CPS. It seems that CPS has

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given individual principals the authority to decide whether they will have a care room or not. If a principal opts not to staff a care room, they MUST have an alternative safety plan for sick students and that plan should be communicated with staff. Building-level safety committees should advocate for a plan that staff can support and [report](#) to the [District Safety Committee](#) if assistance is needed.

Furthermore, CPS is saying that due to the additional concerns about Monkeypox they do not want sick children assigned to the same room. This may be more of an issue in schools where care rooms are in smaller spaces. CTU's research suggests that CPS may not have renewed its contract with the vendor they were using to get additional staffing for care rooms. While it appears that CPS is getting federal dollars to reimburse for care room staff, we are concerned that they are cutting COVID spending where they can.

The new COVID TA says that rapid tests must be available in care rooms so we take the position that schools should have care rooms. Neither CTU bargaining unit members nor SEIU local 73 bargaining unit members, should be forced to staff care rooms.

9. When should our building-level Safety Committee meetings begin?

The District Safety Committee discussed and principals should be willing to meet with building-level safety committees within the first two weeks of school to ensure safety protocols are in place and any initial challenges can be addressed. See #4 above as well—the building-level safety committees are still very important.

Also, the best functioning Safety Committees continued to communicate directly with staff about the importance of masking and testing in our school communications. Please take advantage of union meetings, when distributing masks and materials to students, opportunities to share information during advisory, etc. When educators model that we are still in the midst of a pandemic and share good information with students and families, less people will contract COVID.

Other Back to School Related Questions

10. What about Monkeypox? I'm concerned about the possible spread in schools?

Some of the same protocols we have established during the COVID pandemic

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will help. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers has put together helpful [fact sheets](#).

CTU staff and leadership are talking regularly with CPS about Monkeypox as we're concerned that some public health communication has downplayed the risks inappropriately. We are glad that students, so far, have infrequently been impacted, but we are concerned that the virus could impact more individuals as we head back in schools.

We encourage building-level Safety Committees to raise issues about Monkeypox since many of the same prevention measures help protect from transmission as COVID, enhanced cleaning (especially cleaning surfaces with wipes), handwashing, masking, distancing, care room designation, contact tracing, etc. Additionally, if your school has any cases of Monkeypox, please [report](#) this to the [District Safety Committee](#) immediately.

11. My school building or classroom is still under construction as the school year is starting. Some staff don't have enough time to be ready. What can we do?

We've seen reports from members and have been in touch with CPS leadership about seemingly major and minor ongoing construction and facilities issues that have not been resolved before the start of the school year. Please report major issues to your [CTU Field Representative](#) so that the CTU staff can assist in escalating issues that do not have an effective solution. CTU staff and leadership will gladly help intervene.

CTU has been in touch with CPS and we agree that it is reasonable to expect that impacted staff receive a **clear timeline** for the completion of the repairs, construction, or cleaning work, an offer of **extra duty pay** if educators have to come in on weekends or after hours to get their classroom or workspace ready, and that principals may temporarily **waive principal directed preps** to provide educators additional time during the school day to ready their space. If construction is leading to unsafe conditions that are not being resolved within the building-level safety committee or PPC (e.g. possible LEAD or asbestos exposure), please immediately [report](#) the issue to the [District Safety Committee](#), which has been able to address issues directly impacting the health of staff and students. Additionally, the Professional Problems Committee may try to address clarity on timelines related to issues that aren't necessarily impacting health but are impeding effective teaching, learning and working. Unresolved issues in that case, can be shared with [CTU Field Representatives](#) for additional support and

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referral to other channels.

12. The CPS CEO said that all schools would be clean for the start of the year, but our school is not. What can we do?

First, please utilize the resources on the CTU's [school cleanliness resource page](#) where you will find a Cleaning Tracking [Form](#), a Sample Safety [Agenda](#), a direct Aramark Reporting [Form](#), and information on how to file an on-line OSHA [complaint](#). The page will help you to document that cleaning isn't happening in your school building. Take pictures and log the date and time that cleaning didn't occur. You should also report your concern to your school administration through your Professional Problems Committee, Safety Committee, Local School Council, etc. Make sure that school cleanliness is on the agenda and the administration's response is included in the meeting minutes. If the issue isn't resolved in a reasonable amount of time, reach out to your CTU Field Representative to file a grievance.

13. These Safe Schools online trainings are so long and they are eating up all my time. What is being done or can be done?

The Union filed a grievance last September over CPS requiring educators to complete the Safe Schools training on self-directed and non-working time. That case is headed to arbitration. In the meantime, PPCs should advocate on this issue. We know many principals are reasonable and have waived principal directed preps or paid members to complete these trainings after school. If your principal refuses to provide principal directed time make sure that you document the time that you spent to complete each training.