

## Overview

Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Department of Education (DOE) has implemented a pooled PCR testing program, which is available to any K-12 school administrative unit, public or private, at no cost to the SAU starting in May 2021. Pooled PCR testing is a more efficient way to test large groups of students and staff in schools on a weekly basis.

Pooled testing involves collecting swabs from small groups of students, usually students in a class cohort or homeroom, placing the swabs in a common test tube, mixing several test samples together in a "batch" or "pool" and then testing the pooled sample with a PCR test for detection of SARS-CoV-2. If a pooled test result is negative, then all individuals within that pool are presumed negative and may remain in school. If a pooled test result is positive, then all individuals in the pool must be retested individually. The Abbott BinaxNOW rapid point-of-care antigen test will be the primary source of this individual follow-up testing.

## Why Pooled Testing?

One of the best ways to prevent the spread and impact of COVID-19 is through testing. Pooled testing in schools will help identify and isolate positive cases quicker and allow for more students to remain in school.

Because testing will occur weekly, **individuals participating in weekly pooled testing who are identified as close contacts, and the exposure occurred at school, will not need to be quarantined from school (unless symptomatic)**. Although pooled testing participants do not need to be quarantined from school/school activities if exposure occurs at school, they must follow Maine CDC guidelines for community exposure.

It is important to keep in mind that per Maine DOE/CDC procedures, individuals who do **not** participate in weekly pool testing and who are exposed to COVID at school, are required to quarantine from school. See the attached summary chart for exemptions.

It is also important to keep in mind that per Maine DOE/CDC procedures, individuals who are exposed to COVID **outside of school** are required to quarantine regardless of participating in the pool testing program or not. See the attached summary chart for exemptions.

All individuals who submit consent forms are strongly encouraged to participate in weekly pooled testing. The only exception is that any individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days should be excluded from pooled testing until after 90 days from their positive test result.

**When will Pooled Testing begin?**

Alexander School Department intends to start pooled testing as soon as the on-boarding process with the laboratory is complete. Ideally, we would like to start before the end of November 2021. A notification will be sent ahead of the anticipated start date.

Consent from a parent/guardian must be obtained prior to a minor participating in pooled testing. Parents/Guardians will receive a text and email from the school to provide consent online. To ensure your child can participate at the start of the pooled testing cycle, please complete the online consent form as soon as possible. If you decide to consent to your child participating in pooled testing after the start date, please contact the school. Note that consent can be withdrawn at any time by contacting the school.

**Helping your child know what expect**

- Help prepare your child for the COVID- 19 test: the test includes using a swab put a little way into their nose and twirled around for a few seconds. It may tickle or feel a little itchy. Their eyes might water, or they might even sneeze or cough. This feeling is normal and will go away. Both sides of your child's nose will be swabbed. The school nurse/trained staff will give the child a tissue to wipe their nose after the test.
- The child's job is to lean their head back and sit as still as possible for the test.
- A child may bring a comforting object (i.e. widget) to hold during the test.
- Everyone will need to wear a mask or face covering while in the testing location, and can pull down the mask during testing. The school staff collecting specimens will be wearing masks, gloves, and gowns.
- Your child will have to remove any nasal piercings prior to the test.
- If the child is in second grade and above, they may be asked to collect the sample by putting the swab in their nose. Staff will coach the child on how to collect the sample.
- If your child has had a problem with their nose, like a deviated septum, broken nose and/or recent surgery, you should call your child's doctor to discuss their recommendations for testing.

## How it Works

- Participating students and staff are assigned to pools (i.e. cohorts, classes).
- Pools will be tested on a designated day. Depending on the number of participants and pools, testing may occur over two days.
- Pooled PCR tests will be collected once per week and shipped to a laboratory for testing. Results are received within 24-48 hours and are reviewed during normal school operational hours.
- If a negative pool test result is received, all members of the pool are presumed negative and may remain in school. No notification required.
- If a positive pool test result is received, the parents/guardians of the positive pool will be notified that individual follow up testing is required. Members of the positive pool will be individually tested on the same or the next day of notification using a rapid point-of-care antigen test. Unless symptomatic, it is not necessary to quarantine or isolate until an individual has received a positive test result through follow-up testing.
- The school nurse/trained staff will complete the follow up test per the Abbot BinaxNOW instructions. The results are ready in 15 minutes. If the test is positive, you will get a phone call. If the test is negative, an email or text may be sent instead of a phone call.
- Students who receive positive results from the follow-up testing are required to quarantine from school/community and isolate at home. Students who receive negative results from the follow-up testing may stay in school and resume regular weekly pooled testing.
- If follow-up testing of a positive pool with the BinaxNOW does not identify a positive from among the pool members available, all available members of that pool will be re-tested with a second BinaxNOW no sooner than the next day, but within 2 days. It is not necessary to quarantine/isolate until an individual has received a positive individual test result or is symptomatic.
- If no positive individuals are identified with the second round of BinaxNOW, then the members of the pool can remain at school and will proceed to the next round of regularly scheduled Weekly Pooled PCR testing. According to the Maine CDC - Pooled PCR testing is a form of surveillance and two rounds of negative BinaxNOW indicates that the viral load is not detectable, and therefore unlikely to be infectious.
- Members of a positive pool who are not immediately available for follow up testing with the rest of their pool will receive follow up testing per normal protocol as soon as it is possible to do so, or the individual can pursue COVID-19 testing from a community test site or medical provider and relay test results to the school.

- Any unvaccinated student or staff member who is not participating in Maine's Pooled PCR Testing Program and/or is unwilling to get follow-up BinaxNOW testing as part of a positive pool and is identified as a close contact of a confirmed case will need to quarantine for 10 days.
- Symptomatic individuals should not return to school for any reason, including follow-up testing; instead they should stay home from school and notify the school. Symptomatic individuals are directed to obtain follow-up testing at a community test site or medical office.
- All members of the pool are advised that if they become symptomatic at any point, they should stay home, speak to a school administrator/nurse, and seek testing at a community testing location or medical office.

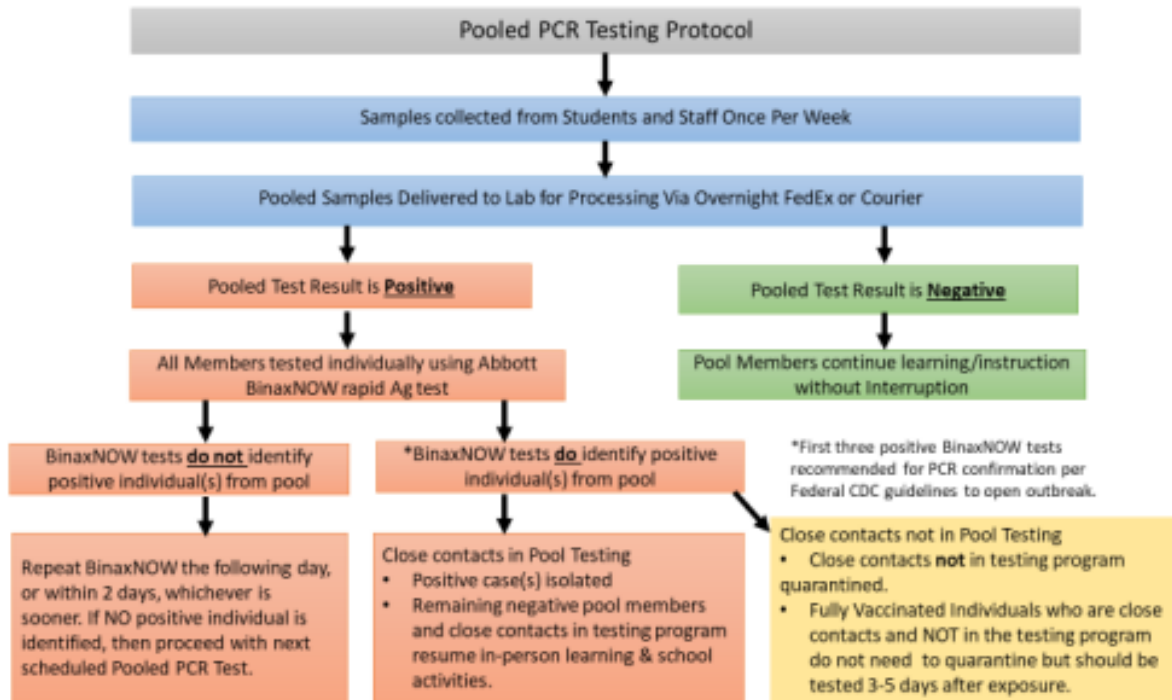
**Summary of Quarantine Exemptions**  
 For each individual who is asymptomatic and who has not tested positive for COVID

Where was the exposure?	Outside of school	Classroom	Bus, lunch area, or other school areas
What exceptions do they qualify for?			
1 Fully vaccinated	No quarantine	No quarantine	No quarantine
2 Positive within 90 days and no longer infectious	No quarantine	No quarantine	No quarantine
3 Pool testing participant	Quarantine	Community quarantine/ May attend school-based activities*	Community quarantine/ May attend school-based activities*
4 School enforces mandatory masking policy, exposure was 3-6', & both CC & COVID+ case are students	Quarantine	Community & activity quarantine/May attend school-day hours**	Quarantine
5 None	Quarantine	Quarantine	Quarantine

\* Individual may attend all school and school-affiliated activities, but must maintain quarantine outside of school activities

\*\* Students may attend class and other school-day events, but must quarantine outside of the school day

### Pooled Testing Flow Chart



Example of Weekly Pooled Testing Program

Day*	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Test Type	Pooled PCR samples are collected	Results from pooled PCR testing returns in 24-48 hrs.		Antigen testing	Second round of antigen testing, if needed
Action	Pooled samples are delivered to lab for processing.	If a positive PCR test returns from a pool, then antigen testing is performed on those who were in the pool the same or next day.		If a positive case is identified using rapid antigen, then the case leaves school and isolates. Initiate applicable SOP guidelines (contact tracing, etc). Other pooled participants return to class.	This will only occur if the first round of antigen testing did not detect a positive case. All students will remain in school if the second round does not identify a positive case and no further testing will occur until the next designated pooled PCR testing day.

\*Schools will have a designated day to perform pooled testing, but not every schools pooled testing day will be Monday.