



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SCHOOLS & SANITARY MEASURES

Return to school in 2021

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WHAT ARE THE CHANGES?

The following measures will be in force as from the beginning of the school year 2021:

Wearing a mask

- **Nursery school:** removal of the obligation for nursery teachers to wear a mask when in contact with children
- **Primary school:** teachers must wear a mask during the first 5 weeks of the school year
- **Secondary level I (high school):** compulsory wearing of masks by pupils and teachers during the first 5 weeks of the school year
- **Secondary level II and tertiary level:** compulsory wearing of masks maintained

Screening

- **Secondary I:** on-site screening available in case of a COVID-19 outbreak in a classroom
- **Other grades:** letter sent to parents/students recommending screening.

Quarantines/closing down classrooms

- **Nursery, primary and secondary level I:** no quarantine, no closing down of classrooms
- **Secondary level II et tertiary:** close contact quarantine, no closing down of classrooms.

WHY THESE CHANGES?

COVID-19 has strongly disrupted the past two school years:

- Interruption of teaching through quarantines or class closures resulting in academic delays, social isolation of students, childcare issues for parents, stress for students and parents.
- Difficulties in sustaining quality contact and teaching while wearing a mask that hides facial expressions.

Currently, vaccination is recommended from the age of 12. The vaccine offers the most effective protection against infection and transmission. It also avoids quarantine measures and thus disruption of school attendance.

However, during the first five weeks of the school year, teachers will continue to wear a mask in primary school, as will pupils and teachers in high school, in order to give people who wish to do so (teachers, pupils aged 12 and over, children's entourage) time to get vaccinated, and to avoid the spread of the virus when they return from their holidays.

After this period, teachers and children who wish to wear a mask will still be able to do so, but it will no longer be compulsory.

WHAT ABOUT SCREENING?

Classroom screening, as initiated in June, will only be implemented in **public high schools (CO)**, where it is most meaningful (no masks are worn by students, and teaching is compartmentalised).

In the event of an outbreak in an public high school class (several cases of COVID-19 with suspected transmission in the class), the Cantonal Doctor's Office will ask the school concerned to organise a screening of the pupils in the class.

Only the children whose parents have signed the consent form are screened. The Cantonal Doctor's Office contacts the parents of the other students recommending that they be tested at a screening centre or by their doctor ([screening centres for children under the age of 16](#)).

The children are tested again in school 5 to 7 days later to check that there are no more sick pupils. The test is repeated every 5-7 days until there are no more positive cases.

The screening test is repeated to identify positive cases early, before children develop symptoms. This prevents uncontrolled transmission in the classroom and possible contamination of families.

Outside the high school, in the event of an outbreak, the Cantonal Doctor's Office sends a letter to parents or students to inform them and recommend that they undergo a free test at a screening centre or at their doctor.

HOW IS CLASSROOM SCREENING CONDUCTED?

Classroom screening is organised by the school concerned.

Children are given a **small spit cup**. Under the supervision of school staff and after explanation of the technique, children spit their saliva into the cup. This container is then transferred to the laboratory for analysis.

There is no swabbing of the nose or mouth. The technique is therefore not unpleasant and provides reliable results.

The test has the advantage of reassuring parents about their child's status (positive or negative for COVID-19) and avoiding a trip to a screening centre. It is also reassuring for the child (test at the same time as his/her classmates, in a known place).

A letter carried home by the child informs the parents that a screening has taken place in the classroom.

The results of the test are sent by SMS to the parents and forwarded to the cantonal doctor's office within 24 to 48 hours.

No results are sent directly to the school. If the child is absent, the parent informs the teacher, as usual.

IS IT COMPULSORY?

Testing is not compulsory.

Testing is voluntary. It is only carried out at school if the parents have signed the consent form and the child agrees to participate in the test.

However, testing is highly recommended, in order to avoid an increase of COVID-19 cases in the classroom and the contamination of families and contacts of the children.

WHAT IS THE COST?

The test is FREE.

MY CHILD HAD COVID-19 LESS THAN 6 MONTHS AGO

In the event of an outbreak, it is recommended that all exposed persons be tested, even if they have had COVID-19.

MY CHILD IS VACCINATED

Vaccination remains the safest way to protect yourself and those around you from COVID-19. However, in the event of an outbreak, it is recommended that all exposed persons be tested, even if they are vaccinated.

I'VE CHANGED MY MIND

- **I didn't sign the consent form**, but I want my child to be screened at his/her school:
 - Without a signed consent form, your child cannot be tested during screening. You can ask your child's teacher for a new consent form, at anytime during the year, and return it completed, to enable your child to participate in the screening at school.

- **I signed the consent form**, but I no longer wish to have my child screened at school:
 - As soon as possible and up to the actual day, you inform the teacher in writing that you are withdrawing your consent.
 - Your child will not be tested during the screening.
 - **The cantonal doctor's office will contact you** to follow up your child.

WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING FOR THE TEST RESULTS?

While waiting for the test results, your child can return to school if he or she has no symptoms.

If your child has symptoms, he or she should stay home. Your child should be tested promptly at a [screening centre for children under 16](#) (or by his/her paediatrician). Depending on the child's state of health, follow up with the paediatrician may be indicated.

TEST RESULT

My child's test is negative

- The laboratory sends the result by SMS to the parents within 24 hours. If your child has no symptoms, he/she can continue to go to school.
- If your child has symptoms, even if the test is negative, he or she must stay home until 24 hours after the end of the symptoms.
- If your child develops symptoms a few days after the test, even mild ones (cold, cough, etc.), he/she should be taken to be re-tested at a [screening centre for children under 16](#) (or by his/her paediatrician) and remain at home until the test result is available.

My child's test is positive

- The laboratory sends the result by SMS to the parents. The child must be put in isolation immediately ([Instructions regarding isolation](#)).
- The laboratory sends the result to the Cantonal Doctor's Office who contacts the parents within 24 hours.

My child is unable / unwilling to take the test at school

The school staff will explain to your child how the test is performed and ask for his/her consent before the test is carried out.

If your child is unable or unwilling to take the test, the Cantonal Doctor's Office will contact you and recommend that your child be tested at a screening centre or by a paediatrician.

My child was not present on the day of the test

The Cantonal Doctor's Office will contact you to assess the situation and find out whether a screening test is recommended for your child.

WHAT IS ISOLATION?

Isolation is the action taken when the test for coronavirus is positive.

A person with a positive test can infect other people. He or she must therefore stay at home and be isolated from others. Isolation lasts at least 10 days.

Only the Cantonal Doctor's Office can decide on an isolation measure and on the end of the measure.

WHAT IS QUARANTINE?

Quarantine concerns people who are at risk of developing COVID-19 because they have been in contact with one or more cases. Infected people are contagious even before they develop symptoms and can unknowingly infect others around them.

Contacts are quarantined. They have to stay at home and limit all contacts, so as not to infect anyone else. These quarantine measures do not apply to people who have been vaccinated (fully vaccinated for less than 12 months) or cured (COVID-19 test positive for less than 6 months).

The quarantine lasts for ten days, but a negative test on the seventh day allows for release from quarantine upon receipt of a negative result.

In secondary level II and tertiary classes, students may be quarantined if they have had close contact (without a mask, for more than 15 minutes, at a distance of less than 1.5m.) with a positive tested classmate. If they are vaccinated or cured, they are not quarantined.

FURTHER QUESTIONS?

- Contact our **HOTLINE** at **022 546 55 27**, 7/7 from 9am to 5pm.
- Send an email to task.sanitaire@etat.ge.ch