



August 4, 2021

Dear School Administrator:

Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) would like to thank you for your efforts during the previous school year to keep students and staff safe from COVID-19. DPH recognizes that students, families, and communities benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority.

With more students returning to in-person instruction, it is even more important that you work with your local public health district to report cases and clusters of COVID-19 that occur within your schools. Georgia law specifically mandates that public and private schools report all confirmed or suspected cases of notifiable diseases to DPH to protect the health and safety of Georgia citizens.¹ The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) authorizes the disclosure of health information to a public health authority during a declared public health emergency in order to protect the health and safety of students and staff.²

Schools are **required** to report cases and clusters through **two methods**.

1. Schools are **required** to notify their local public health department **immediately** when a positive COVID-19 **case, cluster, or outbreak** is identified in the school setting (as required by [§ OCGA 31-12-2](#)).

Purpose: cases identified within the school setting are considered high priority for public health. To limit further disruption to the educational environment, it is imperative to rapidly identify contacts within the school setting and initiate strategies that reduce or prevent further transmission. This is even more important as more students return to in-person instruction.

Clusters of illness are also reportable to public health under notifiable disease reporting rules. This includes clusters or outbreaks³ of COVID-19 or other illnesses.

Schools should collaborate with their local public health department to develop a procedure to report outbreaks to public health. The procedure for reporting cases, clusters, outbreaks, and school closures will vary by individual school and district.

2. Schools are also **required** to report aggregate counts of new cases, contacts identified, and clusters in the school setting to DPH **weekly**.

¹ O.C.G.A. §§ 31-12-2; Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. 511-2-1.02(h), -02(1).

² 34 C.F.R. § 99.36

³ A COVID-19 outbreak in a school setting will be defined as: Two or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff with illness onsets within a 14-day period, who are epidemiologically linked (e.g., have a common exposure or have been in contact with each other), do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing.

Purpose: the weekly reporting efforts fulfill the need for a centralized surveillance of COVID-19 in schools during this pandemic. The aggregate counts from school COVID-19 surveillance allows public health to identify schools and regions of the state where cases are rising among school attendees. When the number of cases rise above what is expected based on community rates and/or concerning clusters are identified, public health can provide recommendations on additional prevention strategies to protect in-person learning.

This mechanism does not replace reporting individual cases and outbreaks to your local public health department.

The weekly cases and cluster data are reported via the following links:

Public Schools: <http://sendss.state.ga.us/survey/form/14139>

Private Schools: <http://sendss.state.ga.us/survey/form/14179>

As a reminder, the Department of Public Health can require schools supply data to our office that are deemed necessary and appropriate for the prevention of COVID-19 under O.C.G.A. 31-12-2(a). This data may include identifying close contact exposures that occurred in the school setting. We look forward to working together to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on Georgia's classrooms.

WEEKLY REPORTING STARTS FRIDAY AUGUST 6, 2021

If you have any questions about this process, please contact the epidemiology department at 404-657-2588.

Sincerely,



Cherie L. Drenzek, DVM, MS

State Epidemiologist

Chief Science Officer