NC DHHS K-12 COVID-19 Response Updates

NC State Board of Education

March 4, 2021

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Agenda

State & National Updates

CDC Operational Strategy for K – 12

K-12 COVID-19 Testing – Expanding Statewide

COVID Vaccine Distribution – Updates and Resources

StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit Updates

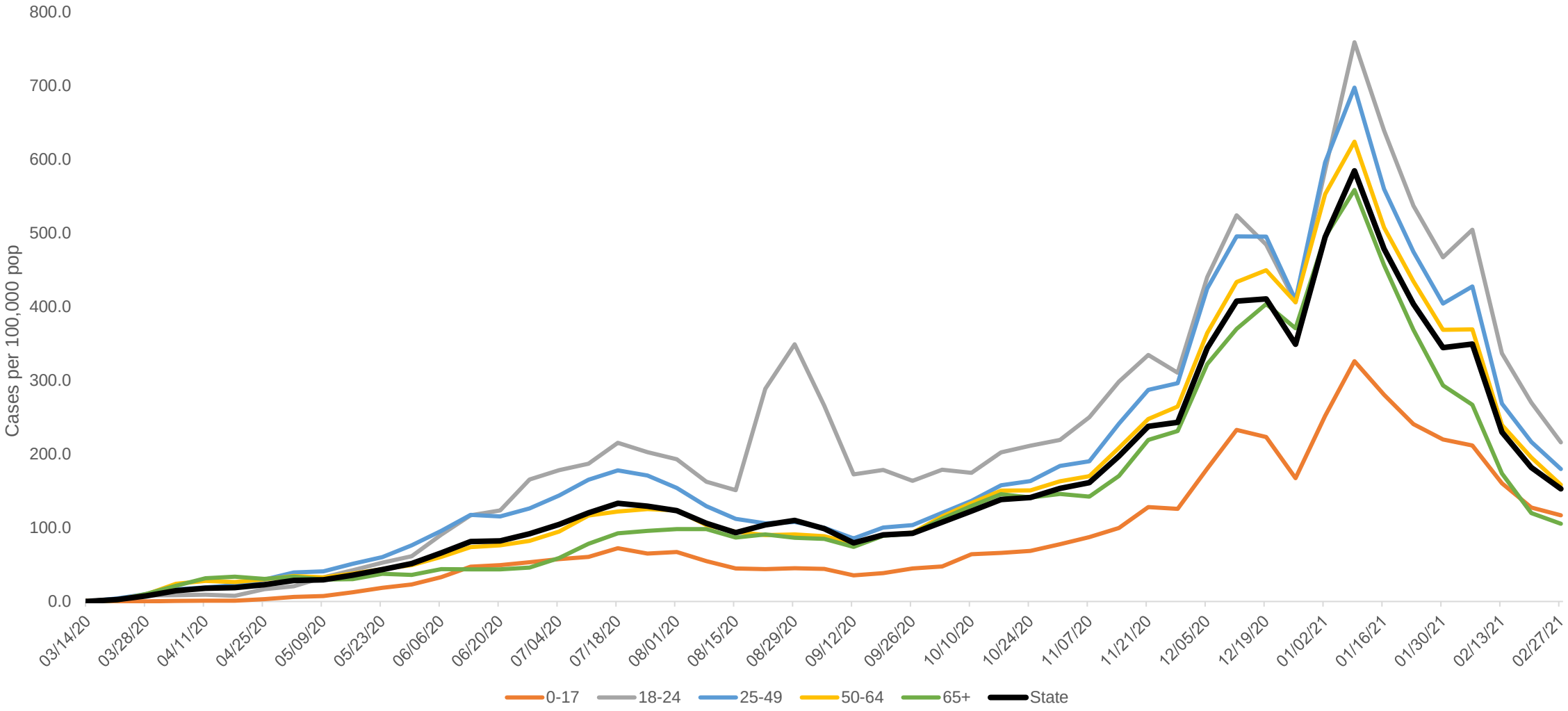
NCDHHS Team Members:

- Susan Gale Perry, Chief Deputy Secretary
- Dr. Betsey Tilson – State Health Director and Chief Medical Officer
- Dr. Aditi Mallick – Director, COVID-19 Operations Center

State & National Updates

Susan Gale Perry, Chief Deputy Secretary

NC COVID-19 Cases Per 100,000 By Age Group & Report Week



K-12 Reported Clusters – as of 3/2/21

- **184 total K-12 clusters since June 2020**
  - 113 at public schools, 71 at private schools
  - When controlling for the smaller number of private schools versus public schools in the state, the ratio of private to public clusters is 2.1 – this means private schools have had over twice as many clusters as public schools

- **1,598 cases associated with all K-12 clusters**
  - 999 cases among students and 599 cases among staff
  - 875 cases among public schools, 723 among private schools

- **62 currently active clusters**
  - 40 at public schools, 22 at private schools

CDC Operational Strategy for K-12 Released Feb 12

HIGHLIGHTS

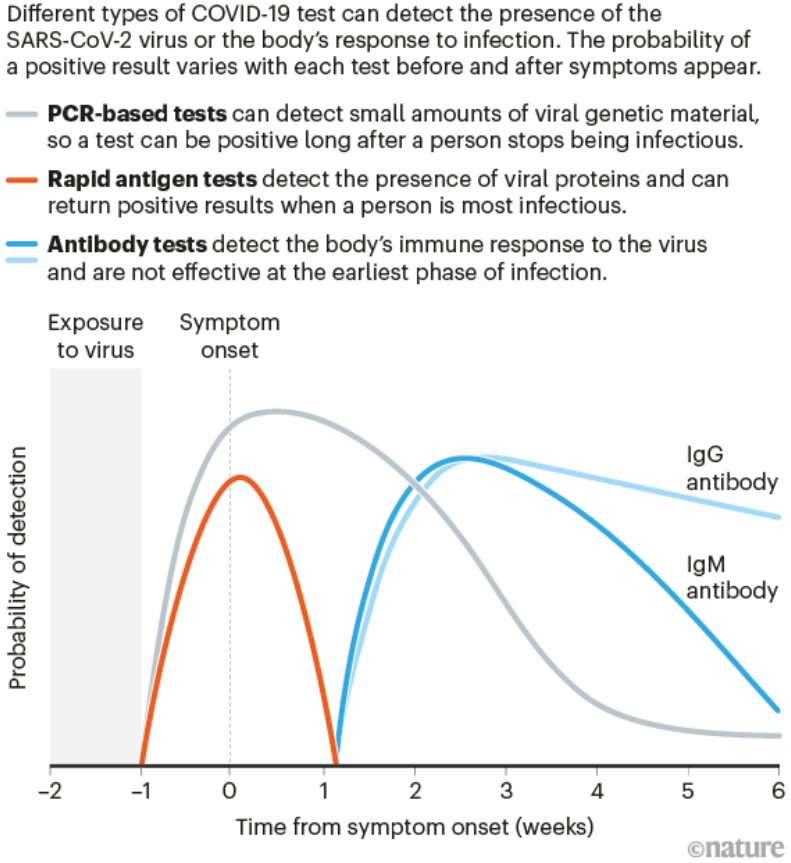
- **Emphasizes importance of schools opening their buildings for in-person instruction**, especially for younger children (K-5, with strict implementation of health and safety mitigation efforts.
- **Directs consistent use of layered mitigation strategies,** especially universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing.
- **Calibrates required/recommended mitigation measures based on four levels of community** transmission as measured by cases per 100,000 and percent positivity rate: Low (Blue), Moderate (Yellow), Substantial (Orange), and Critical (Red)
  - Based on the CDC metrics, 99 of the 100 counties in NC are in the Substantial (10) or Critical Zone (89), even with our improved metrics
  - Requires 6-feet social distancing for middle and high schools for Orange/Red levels
  - Recommends 6-feet social distancing *to the fullest extent possible* for Blue/Yellow levels
- **Recommends vaccines as an additional mitigation effort:** teachers and school staff should be prioritized for receiving vaccine when supply is available.
- **Recommends that K-12 schools support local health departments in facilitating contact tracing** in combination with isolation and quarantine efforts.
- **Recommends diagnostic and screening testing** for COVID-19 as an additional layer of mitigation.

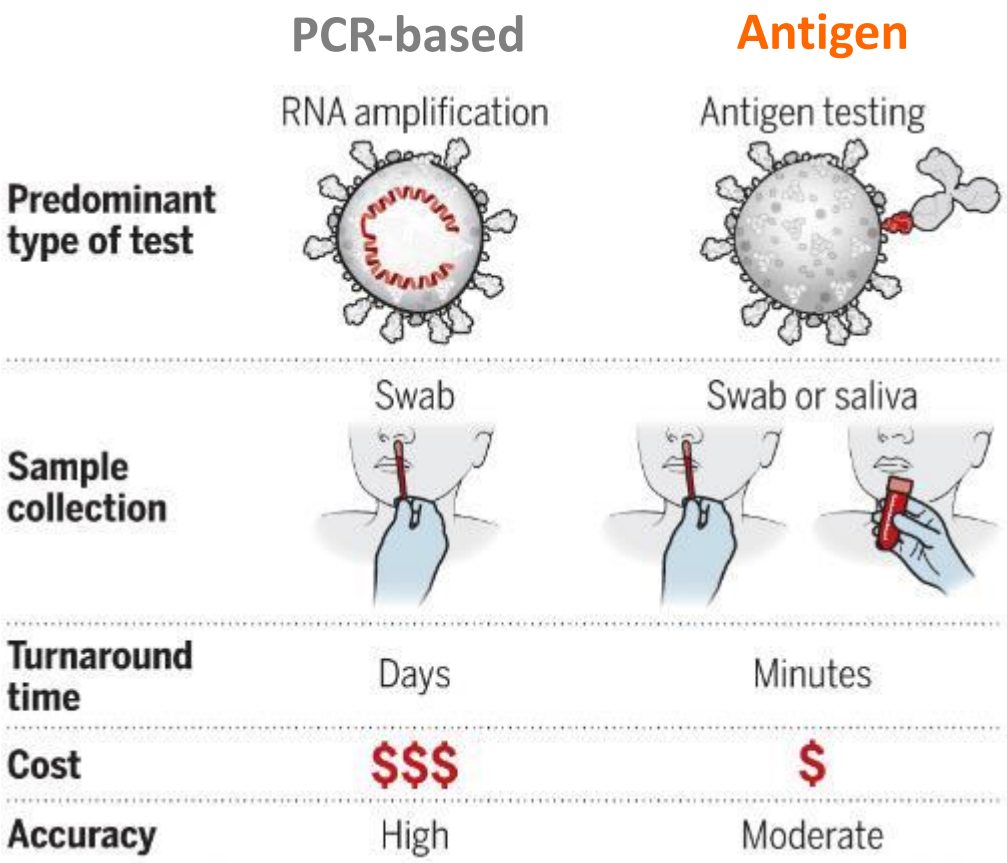
K-12 COVID-19 Testing – Expanding Statewide

Dr. Aditi Mallick – Director, COVID-19 Operations Center

Review: How do we test for COVID-19?

- Molecular/PCR-based tests and antigen tests diagnose current infection
- Antibody tests detect prior infection
- Abbott BinaxNOW are antigen tests; samples are collected via nasal swab





CDC Recommends COVID-19 testing in K-12 Schools

The CDC released its updated K-12 School Operational Strategy on February 12th, 2021, which encourages testing as an additional layer of prevention in schools – NC guidance aligns

- **Testing should be combined with other key mitigation strategies**, such as NC's StrongSchools requirements: universal mask use, physical distancing, handwashing and maintaining healthy and clean facilities

- **Diagnostic testing** for individuals who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 at school or have recent known close contact to a person with COVID-19

- **Screening testing** for all K-12 staff (adults) on a regular, routine basis (e.g., weekly) using rapid tests - sometimes referred to as "surveillance"

NC DHHS Piloted Access to Free Antigen Tests for K-12 Schools

- **In the fall, the US Department of Health and Human Services procured and distributed to states Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 tests**
  - Designed for rapid diagnosis of active infections within 5-7 days of symptom onset
  - Generally, less sensitive than PCR tests (greater chance of false negatives).
  - **Who can do the tests?** Someone who has undergone a training from BinaxNOW (does not need to be a healthcare professional). Testing personnel must collect and report patient and result information properly.
  - **Where can the tests be done?** A location that has a **CLIA certificate of waiver and meet CLIA regulatory requirements**

- **NC DHHS used these free tests to conduct a pilot of COVID-19 testing in K-12 schools**
  - From Dec 2020 to Feb 2021, 53,000 free tests were sent to 17 schools districts and 11 charter schools to conduct testing at over 200 schools
  - 3 check-in meetings along with a pre- and post- survey were used to support participants and gather qualitative and quantitative data about participating schools' experience

NC DHHS Expanding Access to Free Antigen Tests for K-12 Schools

Based on lessons learned from our pilot, NC DHHS will be expanding access to COVID-19 rapid testing to all K-12 public schools on an opt-in basis to add further protection for our students, school staff and teachers.

What	LEAs and Charter Schools may choose to request tests for either or both of the below options without implications for re-opening of their school(s): 1. Testing of all individuals, including students, their families and school staff, who are symptomatic or had known exposure to a confirmed positive case 2. Once weekly screening of all adults – including teachers and staff
Who	All public Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Charter schools are eligible to request tests
When	Beginning Thursday, March 4th, 2021 LEAs/charter schools will be able to request tests through <u>at least</u> the end of the calendar school year
How	LEAs and Charter Schools interested in receiving the free tests are responsible for developing a plan to meet all testing requirements before submitting online request form to NC DHHS

To Receive Free COVID-19 Tests, the LEA/ Charter School Must:

Participating LEAs / charter schools are responsible for meeting all of the below requirements:

1. Obtain an CLIA certificate or partner with an entity with a CLIA certificate
2. Secure a signed physician order for testing or elect to use the Statewide Order
3. Ensure all testing personnel have completed training modules
4. Obtain consent prior to testing students and notify parents/guardians when testing performed
5. Verify ability to meet NC DHHS reporting requirements
6. Maintain an adequate supply of PPE to perform tests
7. Adhere to standards to properly handle and dispose of medical waste
8. Plan for safe isolation and quarantine

LEAs / charter schools can choose to meet these requirements **independently or partner** with a provider, laboratory or other similar organization.

Next Steps for LEAs/Charter Schools interested in free antigen tests

- Online request form and testing guidance launch online via NC DHHS on **Thursday, March 4th**

- LEAs/charter schools can **begin requesting tests** via online request form as soon as they are able to demonstrate that they meet all testing requirements

- **NC DHHS will provide the following resources to support interested LEAs / schools:**
  - Weekly office hours to answer questions from interested or enrolled sites
  - Weekly DHHS-hosted training sessions on test results reporting platform, *eCATR PTR*
  - StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov for ongoing questions and support

COVID Vaccine Distribution – Updates and Resources

Dr. Betsey Tilson – State Health Director and Chief Medical Officer

Your best shot at stopping COVID-19.

YOU HAVE A SPOT. | TAKE YOUR SHOT.

1. Health Care Workers and Long-term Care Staff and Residents — ACTIVE GROUP
2. Older Adults — ACTIVE GROUP
3. Frontline Essential Workers — ACTIVE GROUP
4. Adults at Higher Risk for Exposure and Increased Risk of Severe Illness
5. Everyone

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

For more information: YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov

Vaccine Updates

As of 3/2/2021:

- **Almost 50,000 individuals** who self-identify as being a frontline essential workers in a K-12 or child care center have received a vaccine since February 24th
- There have been **20 identified vaccine events** that specifically target educators either held or scheduled since February 24th

Johnson & Johnson

We now have another tested, safe and effective vaccine to help us get more people vaccinated quickly.

The Food and Drug Administration Authorized the vaccine and the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice recommended it for all adults 18 years and older.

How it Works

- Like the Pfizer and Modena vaccines, scientists built on decades of previous work on similar vaccines to create the Johnson & Johnson one-shot vaccine.
- It teaches your body to make antibodies (germ-fighting cells) against the COVID-19 virus. These germ-fighting cells are then ready to fight off the real COVID-19 if it ever tries to attack.
- Instead of mRNA, the instructions are carried on a type of virus called adenovirus that cannot make you sick.
- You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine

Clinical Trials

- 43,783 participants 18+
- One dose
- Extremely effective in preventing hospitalization and death
- No significant safety concerns. No reports of anaphylaxis
- Similar temporary reactions after vaccination to Pfizer and Moderna: arm soreness, feeling tired, headache, muscle pain, fever

New Resources

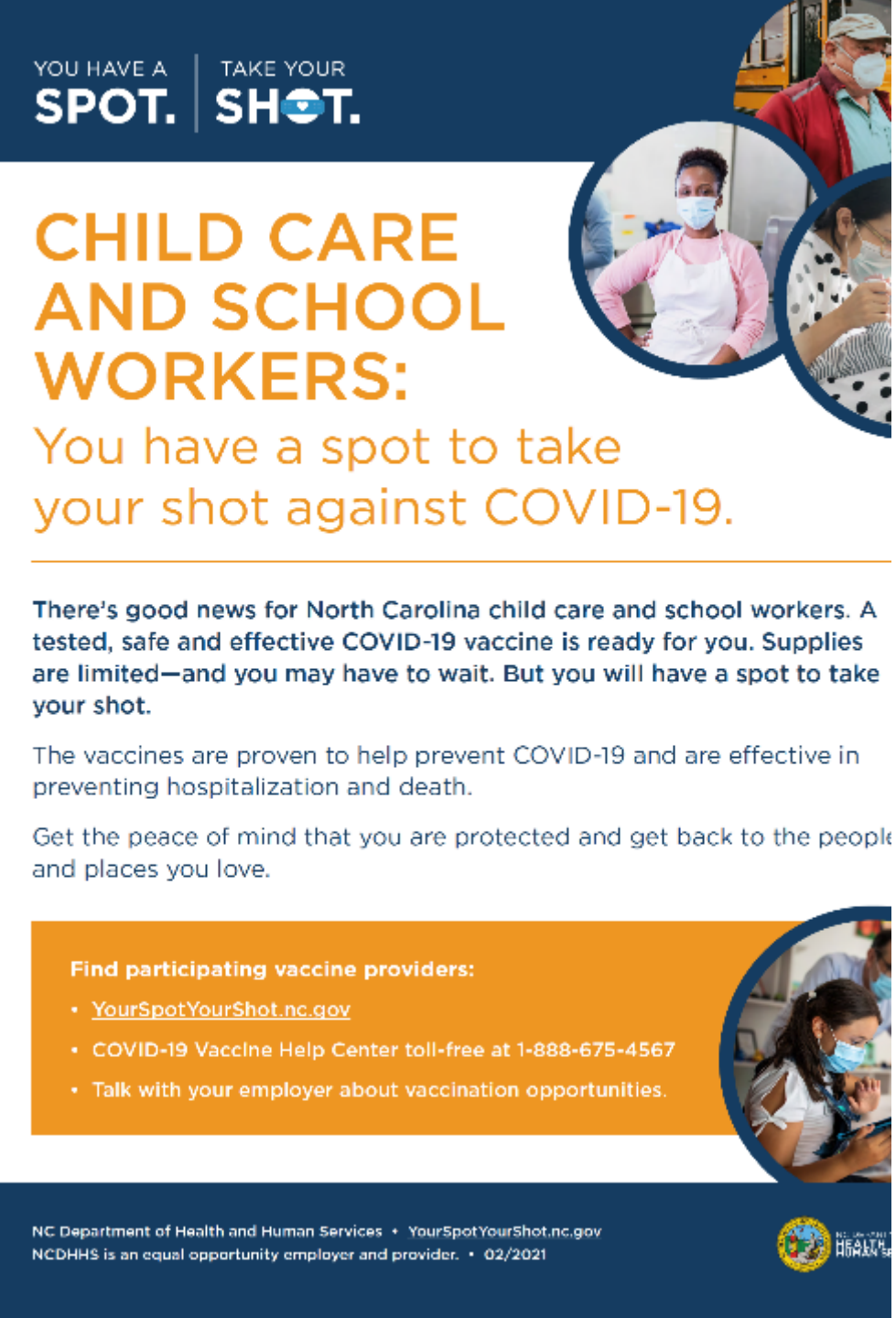
New materials available

- Top Ten Facts
- Developing COVID-19 Vaccines infographic
- Social media graphics and content
- Community posters

Materials in English and Spanish

New Easy-to-Use Toolkit

https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-communications-toolkit



YOU HAVE A SPOT. | TAKE YOUR SHOT.

CHILD CARE AND SCHOOL WORKERS:

You have a spot to take your shot against COVID-19.

There's good news for North Carolina child care and school workers. A tested, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is ready for you. Supplies are limited—and you may have to wait. But you will have a spot to take your shot.

The vaccines are proven to help prevent COVID-19 and are effective in preventing hospitalization and death.

Get the peace of mind that you are protected and get back to the people and places you love.

Find participating vaccine providers:

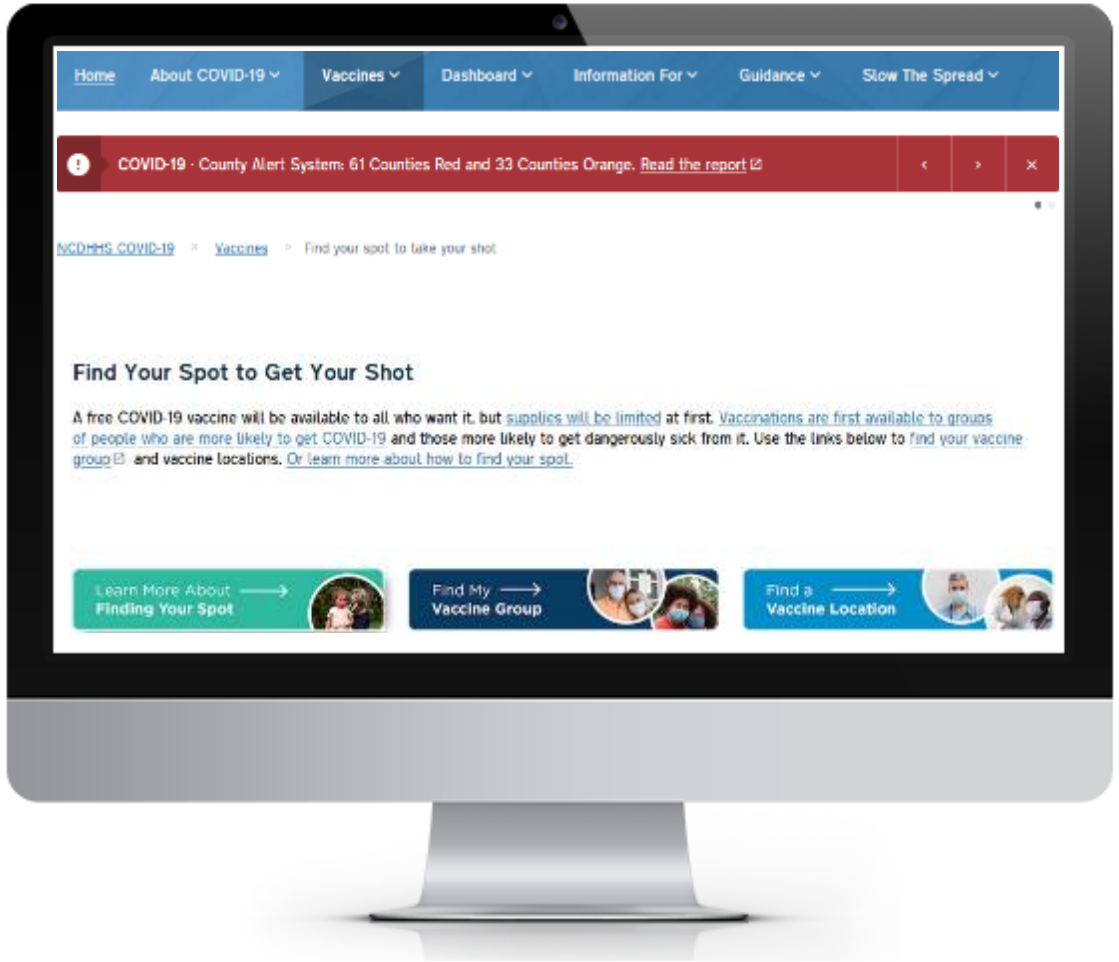
- YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov
- COVID-19 Vaccine Help Center toll-free at 1-888-675-4567
- Talk with your employer about vaccination opportunities.

NC Department of Health and Human Services • YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov
NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. • 02/2021

New Flyer: Child Care and School Workers

- Available in Spanish and English
- Download from Flyers section of the Vaccines Toolkit: https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-communications-toolkit
- Customize your own using our brand guidelines: http://bit.ly/vaccines-brandguide

Expanded Web Tools: Eligibility Tracker, Vaccination Locator



http://yourspotyourshot.nc.gov/

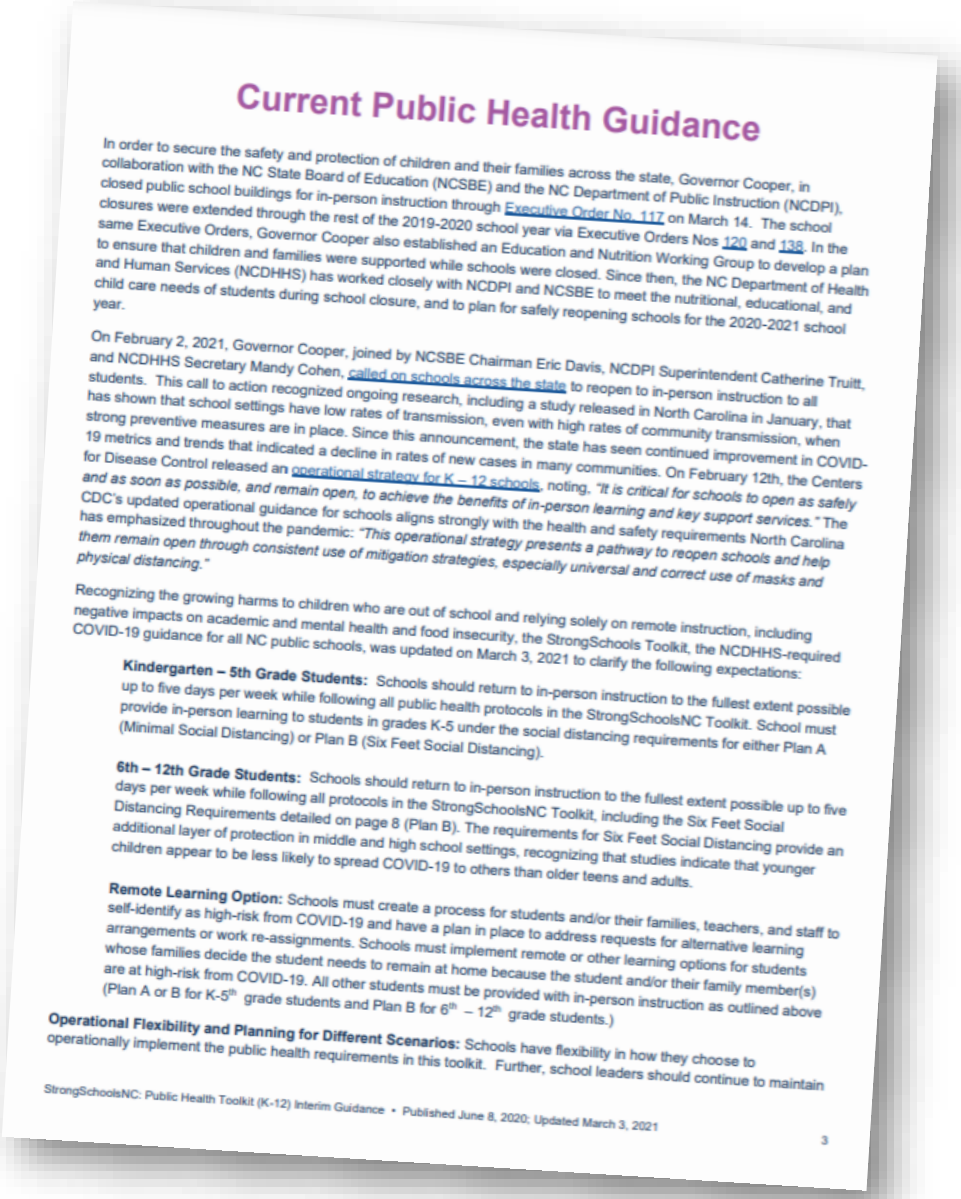
StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit Updates

Susan Gale Perry, Chief Deputy Secretary

March StrongSchoolsNC Guidance Updates

- **Schools should only use remote learning options for higher-risk students and for families opting for remote learning for their children.**
- K – 5th Schools should return to in-person instruction to the fullest extent possible up to five days per week under Plan A or Plan B.
- 6th – 12th Schools should return to in-person instruction to the fullest extent possible up to five days per week under Plan B.

- K-12 COVID testing guidance live
- Other minor updates include inserting new up-to-date links from CDC guidance, formatting changes requested from the field, etc.



Current Public Health Guidance

In order to secure the safety and protection of children and their families across the state, Governor Cooper, in collaboration with the NC State Board of Education (NCSBE) and the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), closed public school buildings for in-person instruction through Executive Order No. 117 on March 14. The school closures were extended through the rest of the 2019-2020 school year via Executive Orders Nos 120 and 138. In the same Executive Orders, Governor Cooper also established an Education and Nutrition Working Group to develop a plan to ensure that children and families were supported while schools were closed. Since then, the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has worked closely with NCDPI and NCSBE to meet the nutritional, educational, and child care needs of students during school closure, and to plan for safely reopening schools for the 2020-2021 school year.

On February 2, 2021, Governor Cooper, joined by NCSBE Chairman Eric Davis, NCDPI Superintendent Catherine Truitt, and NCDHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen, called on schools across the state to reopen to in-person instruction to all students. This call to action recognized ongoing research, including a study released in North Carolina in January, that has shown that school settings have low rates of transmission, even with high rates of community transmission, when strong preventive measures are in place. Since this announcement, the state has seen continued improvement in COVID-19 metrics and trends that indicated a decline in rates of new cases in many communities. On February 12th, the Centers for Disease Control released an operational strategy for K – 12 schools, noting, *"It is critical for schools to open as safely and as soon as possible, and remain open, to achieve the benefits of in-person learning and key support services."* The CDC's updated operational guidance for schools aligns strongly with the health and safety requirements North Carolina has emphasized throughout the pandemic: *"This operational strategy presents a pathway to reopen schools and help them remain open through consistent use of mitigation strategies, especially universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing."*

Recognizing the growing harms to children who are out of school and relying solely on remote instruction, including negative impacts on academic and mental health and food insecurity, the StrongSchools Toolkit, the NCDHHS-required COVID-19 guidance for all NC public schools, was updated on March 3, 2021 to clarify the following expectations:

Kindergarten – 5th Grade Students: Schools should return to in-person instruction to the fullest extent possible up to five days per week while following all public health protocols in the StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit. School must provide in-person learning to students in grades K-5 under the social distancing requirements for either Plan A (Minimal Social Distancing) or Plan B (Six Feet Social Distancing).

6th – 12th Grade Students: Schools should return to in-person instruction to the fullest extent possible up to five days per week while following all protocols in the StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit, including the Six Feet Social Distancing Requirements detailed on page 8 (Plan B). The requirements for Six Feet Social Distancing provide an additional layer of protection in middle and high school settings, recognizing that studies indicate that younger children appear to be less likely to spread COVID-19 to others than older teens and adults.

Remote Learning Option: Schools must create a process for students and/or their families, teachers, and staff to self-identify as high-risk from COVID-19 and have a plan in place to address requests for alternative learning arrangements or work re-assignments. Schools must implement remote or other learning options for students whose families decide the student needs to remain at home because the student and/or their family member(s) are at high-risk from COVID-19. All other students must be provided with in-person instruction as outlined above (Plan A or B for K-5th grade students and Plan B for 6th – 12th grade students.)

Operational Flexibility and Planning for Different Scenarios: Schools have flexibility in how they choose to operationally implement the public health requirements in this toolkit. Further, school leaders should continue to maintain

StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12) Interim Guidance • Published June 8, 2020; Updated March 3, 2021

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Q & A

Reach out to
StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov
for ongoing questions and support about
NC DHHS K-12 COVID-19 response