Public Health Guidance for Pooled Testing

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools recommends screening testing for K – 12 schools as a layered mitigation strategy. The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), in partnership with Concentric by Ginkgo Bioworks (Ginkgo), is offering COVID-19 testing services at no cost to all K-12 Schools across the Commonwealth, with the exception of schools within Philadelphia county, for the entire 2021-2022 school year.

This K-12 testing program is voluntary and free for schools and participants. Participating schools can choose from three testing options when opting in the program, one of which is pooled testing. Learn more about these types of testing offered by Ginkgo.

What steps should schools take based on results of pooled testing?

**Pooled testing is negative**

No additional public health action is needed.

**Pooled testing is positive**

- Re-test all individuals that contributed to the pooled sample as soon as possible. Antigen or PCR testing can be used.
- Individuals who are part of a positive pool do not need to quarantine while they await their follow-up test results unless they are symptomatic.¹
- Symptomatic individuals should not attend school and should be medically evaluated and tested, as appropriate.
- Asymptomatic individuals in a positive pool must follow procedures for follow-up testing. Individuals who receive positive follow-up individual test results will need to be isolated for 10 days.
- Schools should continue to be diligent with implementing other mitigation measures such as masking, physical distancing, and proper ventilation. This is especially critical for the positive pool until individual follow-up testing is conducted.
- Schools may opt to request to quarantine the individuals in the positive pool pending the results of follow-up testing based on the situation.

¹ It is possible that individuals who had COVID-19 (knowingly or unknowingly) but are no longer contagious will cause some pooled tests to come back positive, and every test has a chance of false positives. If a pooled test comes back positive and all individual follow-up diagnostic tests come back negative, schools should re-test all individuals in the positive pool one additional time, ideally with PCR testing, before disregarding the positive pooled test result.