



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Directs Vaccine Providers to Support COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics and Unveils Free COVID-19 Testing Program for Schools Across Pennsylvania

Enola, PA - The Wolf Administration today announced two important initiatives to support K-12 schools and institutions of higher education during the 2021-2022 school year. Starting today, the Pennsylvania Department of Health is directing vaccine providers to support COVID-19 vaccination clinics at institutions of higher education and K-12 schools. Additionally, both Pennsylvania departments of Health and Education today announced a partnership with Concentric by Ginkgo Bioworks (Ginkgo) to provide free COVID-19 testing in K-12 schools across the commonwealth to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and outbreaks in schools during the 2021-2022 school year.

“A priority of the Wolf Administration is to have and maintain in-person instruction, sports programs, and other extra-curricular activities at schools,” Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam said. “Unfortunately, we continue to see predominately unvaccinated Pennsylvanians infected with multiple variants of COVID-19, including the highly contagious Delta variant. This reinforces the need for accessible COVID-19 vaccinations for eligible individuals in K-12 schools so that our students, teachers and staff can stay safe.”

Funding for these initiatives comes from nearly \$338 million in federal U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds [allocated](#) to Pennsylvania to detect, diagnose, trace and monitor COVID-19 and prevent its spread in schools. Both vaccination and testing initiatives exclude Philadelphia County, as Philadelphia Department of Public Health has its own federal funding for these initiatives.

Vaccination Clinics

COVID-19 vaccinations provide the best protection against the virus. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on August 16, 2021, an [order](#) by the Acting Secretary of Health directing vaccine providers to coordinate vaccine clinics with school entities and institutions of high education went into effect. When requested to do so by any institution of higher education or school entity, vaccine providers are expected to make every effort to coordinate a vaccine clinic for the employees, contractors, volunteers, students, or students' families of the school. The clinics can be held at the school or a location agreed upon by the school and vaccine provider. If a provider is unable to coordinate a vaccination clinic with the school, the provider is responsible for directing the school to the Department of Health to be provided with contact information for other vaccine providers. The United States Department of Education recommends schools use the [We Can Do This On-Site Vaccination Clinic Toolkit](#) for help working directly with vaccine providers to setup vaccination clinics.

“Despite COVID-19 vaccines being available for some individuals, adolescents under the age of 12 still cannot be vaccinated to protect themselves against the virus,” Beam continued. “That is why we are encouraging all K-12 schools to take advantage of a unique opportunity to bring COVID-19 testing into your schools free of charge. It is imperative that students, educators, and staff who feel they need or want a test, especially if they think they have been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms, have access to free COVID-19 testing. In addition to getting vaccinated, this testing initiative is another tool in our toolbox for schools to keep ‘Friday night lights’ shining brightly this year.”

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommends that people who are fully vaccinated and have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 be tested three-to-five days after exposure, and to wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result. Otherwise, the department recommends getting tested if you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

K-12 Testing Program

The Wolf Administration’s partnership with Ginkgo allows K-12 school districts throughout Pennsylvania to take advantage of classroom testing and provide safer in-person environments for students and educators. Pooled classroom testing, which combines anterior nasal swab samples from all consenting individuals in a classroom and runs them as a single test, is a simple and scalable way to easily test many students at once while minimizing resource strain. Pooled testing is a strategy that builds on many measures undertaken by schools and public health systems, including vaccination, symptom screening, physical distancing and facilities

improvements, masks/face coverings, hand hygiene, use of personal protective equipment, and monitoring of return to school after illness.

“Students and teachers across Pennsylvania are looking forward to returning to their classrooms for the new school year – let’s do everything we can to make sure they are safe while teaching, learning, and growing together,” said Secretary of Education Noe Ortega. “We encourage Pennsylvania’s schools to continue to coordinate COVID-19 vaccination clinics and participate in the free COVID-19 testing program to help protect their communities and maintain healthy conditions.”

For K-12 schools that participate, pooled testing will be performed weekly to identify and prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the schools. Mid-nasal swab and saliva-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests will be performed. The turnaround time for testing results is 1-2 days after testing. Testing is voluntary, but cooperation will help prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the school and mitigate a school shutdown. This \$87 million testing contract will run throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

“Pennsylvania’s intermediate units are honored to partner with the Pennsylvania Departments of Health and Education to assist schools with implementing multiple mitigation strategies in order to maximize in-person learning opportunities,” said Dr. John George, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units.

Concentric by Ginkgo operates statewide programs in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Arizona, North Carolina, and other states. The program has already been piloted in the state and is immediately accepting sign-ups from schools and districts.

“We built Concentric because everyone’s health is connected, and we’re proud to work with school districts across Pennsylvania to support comprehensive testing within school communities,” said Matthew McKnight, Chief Commercial Officer at Ginkgo. “Asymptomatic testing provides critical information to educators, public health leaders, and community members. Each of us at Concentric is committed to supporting communities as they work to keep kids in classrooms and COVID out this fall.”

To support schools in the event a student tests positive for COVID-19, visit [PDE’s website](#) to access information on responding to COVID-19 cases in schools.

For the latest information for individuals, families, businesses and schools, visit “Responding to COVID-19” on [pa.gov](#).

The Department of Health is working to ensure the vaccine is provided in a way that is ethical, equitable and efficient to all Pennsylvanians:

- All Pennsylvanians age 12 and older are eligible to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine. Use [Vaccine Finder](#) to find a COVID-19 vaccine provider near you.
- A [commonwealth COVID-19 vaccination guide](#) explains the current process for getting one. Pennsylvanians with questions about the vaccination process can call the Department of Health hotline at 1-877-724-3258.
- [Vaccine dashboard data](#) can also be found on the website to find more information on the doses administered and showcase demographic information.
- The [Unite Against COVID Weekly Update](#) is a round-up of news you can use and answers to your most pressing vaccine questions – delivered directly to your inbox every week.
- Frequently asked questions can be found [here](#).

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