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Illinois Department of Public Health Announces \$235 Million Investment to Expand COVID-19 Testing in Middle and High Schools

covidSHIELD testing available for use in schools to help get back to in-person learning

SPRINGFIELD – In an effort to ensure in-person learning can fully resume as quickly and safely as possible, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) today announced a \$235 million investment to expand access to covidSHIELD testing to middle and high schools across the state at low or no cost. The covidSHIELD test, which was developed by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), is a saliva-based test that quickly detects the virus that causes COVID-19, including in people who aren't exhibiting symptoms.

“For in-person learning to occur, we need to help make schools as safe as possible for students, teachers, and staff,” said **IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. “To help prevent an outbreak, it is important to identify cases of COVID-19 as quickly as possible. Having testing readily available in schools can make it easier for more students to be tested and cases identified quicker. Testing, along with vaccination and masking, will help all of Illinois get back to in-person learning.”

Testing will help quickly identify individuals who are positive for COVID-19 so that people who are close contacts of that individual can be quarantined to prevent further spread. This could include exposure in school, sports, or other extra-curricular activities. The more quickly a case can be identified, the number of potential exposures to other people can be reduced, as well as the number of people needing to quarantine.

“We are so excited to have students back in classrooms, reconnected with their teachers and their friends,” said **State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala**. “COVID-19 testing in schools helps to preserve and protect the in-person learning that we have all worked so hard to bring back by quickly identifying any new cases and reducing the risk of transmission. Making testing widely and freely available gives schools another important tool to keep students and educators safe as we move closer and closer to putting the pandemic behind us.”

Instead of a nasal swab, the test uses saliva, which takes minutes to collect and results are available within 12-24 hours after the sample reaches the lab. The specimens will be collected at each participating school and parental consent is required.

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“This is an exciting and pivotal moment for the innovative test developed at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and a welcome commitment from the state of Illinois that will make certain that thousands more of the state’s young people and those who educate them benefit from it,” **University of Illinois System President Tim Killeen said**. “I want to express my gratitude to Gov. Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health for making sure our fast, accurate, and affordable covidSHIELD system is available to offer these students and educators a safe path back to in-person instruction.”

This \$235 million IDPH investment expands on testing currently being offered at Illinois public universities and community colleges. For schools opting to use covidSHIELD testing will be available for free at middle and high schools in districts that are predominately low-income and have experienced high rates of COVID-19 infection. Other schools will receive a discounted fee of \$10 per test. The classification of low-income school districts is determined by the Illinois State Board of Education [Evidence-Based Funding](#). Schools looking for more information on testing or to sign up for covidSHIELD testing can contact Beth Heller at bheller@uillinois.edu.

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