

## **School-Based COVID-19 Testing: Supporting Your Child**

**Project: ACE-IT** (Assisting Childhood Education through Increased Testing) is a program within PolicyLab at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) that supports safe in-person learning for students and staff through routine COVID-19 testing. While you or your child may have had a COVID-19 test, you may have questions about what the process will look like at school and ways in which you can prepare for this experience.



To help guide these conversations with your child, CHOP child life specialists offer these helpful tips.

### **Factors that may influence your child’s response to school-based COVID-19 testing**

- Your child’s age and development
- Your child’s sensory considerations, communication style and ability to adapt to new situations
- How you react to new, stressful situations
- How your child typically responds to health care encounters
- If your child has heard things about COVID-19 testing that are untrue or exaggerated

### **Prepare your child**

Withholding information from children can create more worry, since what they imagine can be worse than reality. One way to reduce this worry and reassure your child is to provide honest, simple information. When talking about something new, choose a familiar environment and time of day when you are both able to be fully present.

- Your child may be wondering why COVID-19 testing is occurring in school.
  - One way to explain that to them might be, *“Similar to mask-wearing, this type of testing is another way to keep school a healthy and safe place.”*
- Prepare your child by using words they understand and can relate to.
  - For example, to prepare for an anterior nasal swab test, consider saying, *“First, you will be asked to pull your mask down below your nose. Then a small Q-tip will go a short distance into one side of your nose and circled around for about 10-15 seconds. The same thing will happen on the other side of your nose.”*

### **Support your child**

Each child responds to new information in different ways. Regardless of how your child responds, validate how they are feeling. By doing so, you are providing them with a safe space to express their emotions. For instance, you may consider saying, *“It seems that you’re upset by hearing this information. It’s okay to feel that way. Let me know when you are ready, and we can talk about ways to make this a more comfortable experience.”*

It is also important to avoid comparing your child to siblings or other children. While you may think you are encouraging your child, this can have the opposite effect and can lead to embarrassment. What follows are three common reactions a child may have upon hearing new information as well as suggested strategies.

- Your child may become upset, angry and/or overwhelmed. These can all be normal reactions and does not mean you should avoid the conversation. Revisit the topic after they have had some time to process the information.
- Some children respond to new information by asking a lot of questions. By answering their questions, you are helping them to feel more in control of the situation. If you don't know the answer, you can offer to find out.
- It may look like your child is not reacting to what you share. This may be your child's way of processing new information. You might consider letting them come to you when they are ready or re-visiting the conversation later.

### **Help your child cope**

When children are able to participate in their own care, they often feel a sense of control. This can lead to increased cooperation during a new experience. One way to involve your child is to discuss what might help them feel calm during a stressful time. These are often referred to as coping skills. Here are some suggestions you and your child can talk about or practice together:

- Discuss what has helped them cope in the past and what could help in this situation
- Ask your child if they would like to be told what is going on before and during the test or if they'd rather focus on something else (distraction)
- For children who may prefer distraction, ask them what they might like to focus on (e.g., using an electronic device, closing their eyes, humming a favorite song)
- Additional coping strategies can be found by visiting the following links: [Deep Breathing: Coping with Healthcare Procedures](#) and [Teens, Stress and COVID-19](#)

### **Advocate for your child's needs**

Being that you know your child best, it is important to communicate their needs to the testing team. If your child feels comfortable, encourage them to share what will help during the test. Here are some examples of what you may want to highlight when communicating with the testing team:

- Communication needs (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, iPad, communication board, American Sign Language)
- Sensory considerations (e.g., one person talking at a time, calm voice when speaking, dim lights, simple commands)
- Calming strategies (e.g., sensory toys, offer a break, change testing clinician)
- Having a caregiver present during the testing process for holding and/or comforting

\*If your child has a history of physical aggression during health care encounters (e.g., hitting, biting, kicking) please inform someone on the testing team.

### **For additional information, please visit:**

[Prepare Your Child for COVID-19 Testing](#)

[Talking with Your Child about the Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

[Getting Your Child to Wear a Face Mask](#)