



# Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc.



## RESOURCE GUIDE FOR MONITORING SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM NITHA Partner Communities COVID-19 School Surveillance

### ***Importance of Monitoring Absenteeism***

Many schools across the country routinely collect and monitor absenteeism as a surveillance tool for COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. While absenteeism can be due to multiple reasons such as poor weather conditions, high illness-related absenteeism can be an early signal that there may be transmission of a disease, including COVID-19. Therefore, it is important for schools to monitor their absenteeism rates and investigate when absenteeism is higher than usual to allow communities to quickly implement measures to reduce the spread of communicable diseases.

### ***Absenteeism Threshold***

If and when a school reaches an absenteeism that is 10% higher than the “baseline” or expected absenteeism, further investigation should be completed to rule out reasons other than illness for the high absenteeism, such as cold weather or a community event that would be impacting absenteeism. If the reason for higher than usual absenteeism is suspected to be illness, further action should be taken (see below).

### ***Actions Following High Absenteeism Due to Illness***

Testing is important for early detection of infections to prevent further transmission in the community. It is recommended to begin to plan for and implement rapid antigen testing (RAT) in the school or recommend at home self-testing for students and staff. If the absenteeism is predominantly within a classroom or cohort, testing could initiate there.

Additionally, enhanced measures can be introduced in schools including:

- continue to encourage daily self-monitoring of all students, staff and visitors for COVID-19 like symptoms
- review and complete environmental cleaning and disinfection protocols and enhance cleaning and disinfection of the facility
- maintain accurate records of staff and student attendance, including school transportation, before and after school program, etc.
- require or reinforce best-fitting masks and face coverings indoor, and make masks available to students, as needed.

If concerned with the illness-related absenteeism, notify your community health nurse for further support.

### ***What to do if you have PCR or rapid antigen positive cases identified among students and staff?***

In the event of positive cases (either rapid antigen or PCR) are reported to the school, please follow your current COVID-19 protocols. If there are multiple cases (three or more, PCR or rapid antigen, positive cases from at least two different households) within the same cohort, classroom, or bus group within a 14 day period where transmission is known or suspected to have occurred in the school setting, we would recommend notifying your Community Health Nurse for further support and direction.