

# School districts set to begin rapid tests next month

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WALHALLA — The school districts of Oconee and Pickens counties on Friday announced they expect to begin rapid COVID-19 testing upon returning from Christmas break.

"SDOC is currently completing the required certification and training process," School District of Oconee County spokeswoman Jennifer Dodd said. South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster

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announced last week that all South Carolina schools will have the ability to offer rapid COVID-19 testing. Schools are required to obtain a permission form from a parent or guardian before any student can be tested.

The goal of the program is to quickly determine if students and staff are infected and isolate them. Schools will have to train employees — specifically nurses and athletic trainers — on how to administer the tests, which will involve a shallow swabbing inside the nose.

School District of Pickens County spokesman John Eby said while his district plans to do rapid testing, its priority will

likely involve testing of staff.

"We haven't finalized our plan, but we will receive the tests next week," Eby said.

While rapid testing kits are being made available to all school districts, not all school districts plan to take part. Greenville County Schools, the largest school district in the state, announced Friday it does not plan to accept the tests and cited, among its reasons, other COVID-19 testing options in the county, as well as not wanting anyone who doesn't feel well to come to school.

Oconee officials also announced Friday the district has adjusted quarantine guidelines for schools. Students and staff will now be required to quar-

antine for 10 days, rather than 14 days, from the last exposure to a person who tested positive. For those currently quarantined, the quarantine period will be shortened by four calendar days, and Dodd said the district is reaching out to those individuals to adjust their return-to-school date.

At this time, Dodd said the district would not implement the option for students and staff to return after seven days with evidence of a negative test. Dodd said the decision was made considering demands on school personnel and due to the complexity of managing multiple quarantine lengths and verifying test results.

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