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Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education



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MEMORANDUM

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents, Collaborative Leaders, Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools
From: Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Margaret Cooke, Commissioner, Department of Public Health
Date: August 15, 2022
Subject: Update on COVID-19 Matters in K-12 Schools for Fall 2022

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) have provided guidance and support to K-12 schools and districts across the Commonwealth to promote the health and safety of our students, staff, and families.

As we prepare to open schools and welcome back students in the coming weeks, we are all looking forward to providing our students with in-person experiences that will offer rich learning opportunities, robust extra-curricular activities, and an educational environment for positive social interactions among students and between students and staff.

With COVID-19 vaccines now readily available, treatments accessible to those at higher risk for severe disease, and widespread availability of self-tests, DESE and DPH have continued to evolve our support for schools in collaboration with the medical community and in line with the most [recent CDC guidance](#) issued August 11, 2022. This upcoming school year, districts and schools should focus their COVID mitigation strategies towards vulnerable and symptomatic individuals.

The Commonwealth is not recommending universal mask requirements, surveillance testing of asymptomatic individuals, contact tracing, or test-to-stay testing in schools. Districts and schools are reminded that there is no longer any statewide masking mandate in schools (other than school health offices) and there is no testing requirement for schools. We concluded our statewide testing program in the spring and have provided schools and districts with information about how they can purchase face masks and testing kits, if they choose to do so to address local needs. This memo is intended to provide a brief update and review of recommendations on COVID-19 matters as we begin the 2022-23 school year. As always, schools and districts should continue to call the Rapid Response Help Center at 781-338-3500 with any questions or concerns.

Vaccine Clinics

Vaccines continue to be the best way to protect individuals against the effects of COVID-19. DESE and DPH strongly recommend that all faculty, staff, and students, including the Commonwealth's youngest children ages 6 months – 5 years, receive the COVID-19 vaccine primary series and all boosters, as they become eligible for them. For schools that are interested in setting up vaccine clinics on campus with a DPH-approved mobile vaccination provider, including clinic staff and vaccination administrators, free of charge, please fill out a request via the [online form](#). Please see this [link](#) for more information.

Throughout this August and September, DPH is offering [free family-friendly vaccine clinics to prepare teachers, staff, students, and family members](#) for going back to school. No ID, health insurance, or appointment is needed at these clinics, and fliers to promote them to families are available in multiple languages and can be found [here](#). Information about these vaccination clinics and others across the state is available online at [VaxFinder](#).

In addition to recommending the COVID-19 vaccine, it continues to be essential that the educational and public health communities, as well as cities and towns, work together to ensure as many children and adults as possible receive flu vaccines. This will reduce the number of students and staff who need to stay home due to illness.

Isolation and Exposure Precautions

Effective August 15, 2022, all students and staff in childcare, school in grades K-12, or participating in out-of-school time (OST) and recreational camp settings should follow the updated isolation and exposure guidance issued by DPH, in alignment with recently issued guidance from CDC. No asymptomatic person should be excluded from school as a result of exposure, regardless of vaccination status or exposure setting.

As a reminder, contact tracing is no longer recommended statewide in K-12 schools.

Masking

There is no statewide requirement for masking in schools, apart from in [school health offices](#), and the Commonwealth is not recommending universal mask requirements. As always, any individual who wishes to continue to mask, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19, should be supported in that choice.

Schools and districts may purchase masks through the [statewide contract](#).

COVID-19 Testing

With the conclusion of the statewide K-12 COVID-19 testing program, staffing, supplies, software, and all other services previously provided via CIC Health are no longer available through the state.

In line with recent CDC guidance, screening testing and test to stay are not recommended. As communicated in an [updated testing memo](#) released on May 25, 2022, **DESE and DPH strongly recommend that schools and districts interested in implementing their own testing program during the 2022-23 school year limit that program to symptomatic rapid testing.**

Districts and schools choosing to implement in-school testing must secure whatever staffing and test supplies are necessary to implement their program.

Additionally, districts are encouraged to purchase a supply of self-tests for students and staff through [statewide contract](#) HSP 41 to prepare for possible outbreaks.

Please note, per DPH and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requirements, all schools administering in-school testing either by using the remaining supply of tests from the state or their own supply must adhere to the following requirements:

Situation	CLIA Certificate of Waiver Required	Reporting to DPH Required (Positives Only)	Provider's Order Required
BinaxNOW "Professional" or other official Point of Care test, any testing reason	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-Test sent home, any testing reason	No	No	No
Self-Test performed and result interpreted at school by the individual being tested, any testing reason	No	No	No
Self-Test performed or result interpreted by third party (e.g. staff), any testing reason	Yes	Yes	Yes

Reporting positive results:

Beginning in summer 2022 and going forward, only positive tests conducted at school sites by school staff (per the above CLIA parameters) must be reported to the DPH using SimpleReport. These results will be incorporated into DPH's aggregate case reporting. Positive case counts no longer will be reported through DESE's security portal.

For detailed information regarding the above requirements, including applying for the CLIA Certificate of Waiver, obtaining a provider's order, and using SimpleReport, please refer the [COVID-19 Testing FAQ](#) released on June 9, 2022. Schools and districts interested in applying for a CLIA Certificate of Waiver should do so as soon as possible. Questions may be directed to k12covid19testing@mass.gov.

School Health Offices

School nurses have an important role in monitoring and supporting the health and safety of students and school staff and supporting safe in-person learning. The [DPH guidance](#) for school health offices, condensed in spring 2022, addresses areas of particular importance to school

nurses, including PPE, key health office protocols, procedures for working with specific populations, and working with and communicating with local boards of health.

Operational Considerations

Structured learning time: Please note that the 180-day school year requirement remains in effect. Any school closures due to COVID-19 emergencies will be treated like snow day closures, with additional days added to the school year if needed to meet the 180-school day requirement.

Attendance reporting: As a reminder, schools can reduce student absences by allowing individual students to livestream their classes from home during the period of isolation, if feasible.

Ventilation: Districts are encouraged to continue to:

Assess their ventilation systems and ensure they are operating properly

Conduct routine maintenance (such as replacing filters and repairing duct work)

Consider adding air purifiers

Increase outdoor air flow supply such as by opening windows in classrooms as feasible

Open windows on school buses as feasible

More information about ventilation is available [here](#).

Rapid Response Help Center

The Rapid Response Help Center continues to be a resource for district and school leaders.

Please contact the Help Center at 781-338-3500 with any questions. Districts and schools must contact the Help Center for guidance if they are experiencing a high volume of cases.

Notification should also be provided to local boards of health and district leadership.

Closing

We are grateful for your diligence and resourcefulness throughout the pandemic. We will continue to share information through the [Commissioner's Weekly Update](#) and on the [Guidance/On the Desktop](#) section of the DESE website.