

COVID-19 ADVISORY MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Heads of Independent Schools
FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
Mark A. Levine, M.D., Commissioner of Health
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation Measures for Winter 2022
DATE: January 13, 2022

Background

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Vermont schools have pivoted as necessary to provide the best possible education for Vermont's students given the context of the virus and its spread in the community. This winter, given the widespread and highly transmissible Omicron variant, schools must again adjust their prevention and mitigation strategies so that they can remain open for in-person instruction and maintain a safe and healthy environment for students and staff.

COVID-19 Prevention Strategies for the Opening of Schools

Stay Home When Sick

Students and staff who are sick should stay home. This is the most important prevention message.

All students and staff should stay home if they:

- Show [symptoms of COVID-19](#);
- Have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F); or
- Are currently in isolation due to testing positive for COVID-19.

If symptoms begin while at school, the student or staff member should be tested for COVID-19 and sent home as soon as possible (regardless of test results), and the individual should be isolated from other staff and students until they can go home. If they test negative (1 PCR/LAMP test or 2 antigen tests as close as possible to 24hrs apart) for COVID-19 they can return to school when symptoms improve and they are fever free for 24 hours.

Students and staff who are presumptive contacts should pick up test kits in accordance with their vaccination status.

Universal Mask Requirements

Schools should require universal masking for *all* students and staff when indoors until February 28, 2022 at which time the requirement will be revisited.

If it is not extended, after February 28, 2022, masks should no longer be required for all those eligible for vaccination when the vaccination rate among students is equal to or greater than

80% of the school's currently eligible population. Currently, all Vermonters ages 5 and older are eligible to be vaccinated.

Masks, when required, may be removed when needed for instructional or operational purposes.

Masks are currently required for *all* passengers on buses per federal regulation, regardless of age or vaccination status.

Masks should not be required outdoors.

Use of High-Quality Masks

The Vermont Department of Health recommends the use of high-quality masks such as procedure masks, KN95s and fit-tested N95s as applicable / available, to help prevent transmission of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2. When properly worn these masks prevent transmission of respiratory droplets.

SU/SDs and Independent Schools may use eligible federal funds, or FEMA Public Assistance (PA) to purchase high quality masks for staff and students.

Test at Home to Replace Surveillance Testing and Contact Tracing

Surveillance testing and in-school Test to Stay programs will be replaced by the Test at Home program. In the new program, at-home antigen tests will be provided for students who shared a classroom with an identified COVID-19 case. In-school rapid antigen and PCR / LAMP tests will be available for diagnostic testing. See [Test at Home: Vermont School COVID-19 Testing Protocol Winter 2022](#) for additional information on the 2022 testing program.

Schools should no longer conduct contact tracing.

Students and staff should follow the Health Department's updated guidance on [What to Do if You Test Positive for COVID-19](#) and [What to Do if You are a Close Contact](#).