

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 Measures for Fall 2021
DATE: August 4, 2021

Background

Our goal is to maintain full in-person instruction throughout the school year. We will work to continue to transition to a point in time when addressing COVID-19 is more like managing the impacts and disruptions of seasonal influenza. Vermonters have achieved among the highest rates of vaccinations against COVID-19 in the world. We are confident this goal is achievable provided that strong vaccination uptake continues among the adult population and we see a similar rate of uptake among children younger than 12 years of age when vaccines are approved for this age group. However, we must acknowledge that COVID-19 cases and clusters will continue to occur in Vermont and elsewhere. Thankfully, the science is clear - vaccines are very effective at preventing COVID-19 cases and even more effective at preventing hospitalization or worse outcomes.

Based on the current data, it appears that a state of emergency will not be justified this year. Because of this, we will issue a series of advisory memos instead of formal guidance documents. These advisory memos may be updated in response to changing operating conditions.

This first memo is to guide local decision making for the opening of schools for the 2021-2022 school year.

COVID-19 Prevention Strategies for the Opening of Schools

Stay Home When Sick

School health personnel should use the [COVID-19 in Pediatric Patients Flow Chart \(Pre-K – Grade 12\) Triage, Evaluation, Testing, and Return to School](#) in partnership with pediatric providers and families to guide medical decision-making.

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 quarantine due to close contact with an individual with COVID-19 or in isolation due to testing positive for COVID-19.

If symptoms begin while at school, the student or staff member should be sent home as soon as possible, and the individual should be isolated from other staff and students until they can go home.

Masks

To allow school districts time to calculate the percentage of currently eligible students who have received two doses of a two-dose vaccine, schools should require universal masking for *all* students and staff when indoors for the first 10 instructional days of the school year. Currently, all Vermonters ages 12 and older are eligible to be vaccinated.

Following the first 10 instructional days of the school year, masks should no longer be required for all those eligible for vaccination when the vaccination rate (two doses of a two-dose vaccine) among students is equal to or greater than 80% of the school's currently eligible population.

Masks should be required indoors for students younger than 12, who are not eligible to be vaccinated at this time.

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.

Guidance will be updated when vaccine eligibility expands.

Surveillance Testing and Contact Tracing

Surveillance testing will be offered to schools for both students and staff.

Schools should continue to participate in contact tracing as requested by the Health Department.

More information on what to do when there is a positive COVID-19 case in PreK-12 schools, child care centers, camps and out of school programs and contact tracing can be found on the [Vermont Department of Health website](#).