



## From the Desk of Tom Lengel: Updated COVID-19 Policies & Procedures

I am writing to you now, in preparation for our return to school in four days. With the dramatic spread of the Omicron variant affecting all sectors of society, the next 3-4 weeks will be challenging for all of us. We still plan to open with in-person instruction on Monday, but as I have communicated since the beginning of this pandemic, our ability to **remain** open will be largely dependent on your actions in maintaining the health of our entire school community. So please remember:

- DO NOT send your child to school if s/he is unwell. Children with symptoms such as cough, runny nose, sore throat, nasal congestion, fever, chills, new loss of taste or smell, GI symptoms, fatigue, or headache should stay home. **Please err on the side of caution during this unprecedented surge of cases in our area. This is one of the most important ways we can mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus.**
- To communicate immediately to the School Nurse, Jessica Travaglini, if your child or any member of your household becomes COVID positive (and see below for new, less restrictive quarantine guidelines in many such circumstances).
- That we will continue to inform the entire grade when a student or teacher becomes positive and may have exposed others to the virus.
  - The caveat to this is that in order to protect people's privacy, we will not communicate cases that do not meet the definition of an exposure at school.

Given the explosion in Omicron cases, we will maintain our mask mandate for the time being. And I encourage parents to consider surgical masks for their children, since they are clinically proven to be more effective than cloth masks. Also, please remind your children of the importance of

wearing their mask consistently and appropriately, i.e. above their nose. Now is not the time to get lax about masking as it is a key mitigation strategy.

We will also be modifying our lunch routine by having most of the children eat silently in their homerooms, facing forward and spread out, as we did last year. This is another important means of preventing spread and allowing us to remain open, as we would eliminate “lunch exposures” and quarantining of these students.

Some very good news to share is that the Pandemic Advisory Council, in response to the recently updated CDC guidelines, has approved reducing the amount of time that a person who has tested positive needs to quarantine. Starting January 3, 2022, our policy will be the following:

- The time for isolation for individuals who test positive will be seven days. They may return to school on Day 8 if they are asymptomatic. (We hope to reduce this period of isolation for COVID positive individuals to five days when local numbers improve.)
- Any **fully vaccinated** student, faculty, or staff member who has been exposed to the virus **but is asymptomatic** will now be able to come to school. This includes household exposures.

The Pandemic Advisory Council will soon review the protocols for unvaccinated people who have exposures. We hope to reduce the quarantine period for all Holy Child families. For now, however, the quarantine period for unvaccinated individuals who have had an exposure will continue to be 5 days, and they must present a negative test result to return.

Lastly, let me share some more thoughts about the Omicron virus and our current situation. It is not a question of **if** our school community will be affected by Omicron, but when and how dramatically it will hit us. And while hard data about Omicron’s impact on children is not yet clear, it appears that most children are not being seriously affected by this variant, and that in many ways, it may not be any more lethal than the flu.

I write this to help manage everyone's expectations. It is likely in the next 2-4 weeks that we will experience more COVID cases in our community than we have in the previous 16 months combined.\* The potential upside to this surge is that Omicron, in children especially, may become endemic, and thus aid society's overall recovery from COVID.

To help us be as safe as possible, I ask and urge all eligible members of our community to get vaccinated. I do not make that request lightly, and I do so while attempting to be resolutely apolitical. But the scientific evidence is clear and incontrovertible that vaccines prevent the spread of the COVID virus, and dramatically mitigate the severity of symptoms for those who get COVID.

Masking, vaccinations, and our other protocols are working. I had hoped, before Omicron, that we might be able to relax our mask mandate by mid-January, but it will need to continue for the foreseeable future.

Let us all continue to be vigilant, and to prioritize the health and safety of our school community.

With prayers and hopes for a better new year.

Sincerely,

Thomas G. Lengel P'12  
Head of School

\*At its meeting next week, the Pandemic Advisory Council will be reviewing the metrics to determine when a grade or division of the School would have to go virtual. This will also be a function of teacher availability.