



January 14, 2022

Dear Lamoille North Families and Staff,

The past two weeks were a whirlwind culminating late today with the Vermont Agency of Education (VTAOE) issuing final changes in school COVID-19 contact tracing and testing options. It would be an understatement to say that the recently announced changes in COVID-19 protocols by the VTAOE have caused some concern and confusion in our school community. We hope that this letter will bring you some answers and reassurance. The Vermont Department of Health (VTDOH) and the VTAOE have updated all guidelines again as of January 14, 2022. Click [HERE](#) to read the latest Winter Protocols & Advisory Memos. The guidance covers a wide range of topics concerning COVID-19 compliance procedures in schools and should be thoroughly reviewed.

The current strain of COVID-19, Omicron, has a shorter incubation period than earlier strains. This means that the time from exposure to symptom onset is shorter. This is why the CDC shortened quarantine for close contacts, and is also why the VTAOE will no longer be supporting the PCR surveillance testing in schools. Click [HERE](#) for the most up-to-date guidance on what to do if you're a close contact.

PCR tests, while highly accurate, are not very useful with Omicron. This is because the test you take at school on Monday morning only tells us if you had COVID-19 when that test was taken. Since we do not get the results of your PCR test until Wednesday, it is not very helpful to have information that is already two days old, when we know that symptoms of Omicron may have developed rapidly between Monday and Wednesday. In light of this, it is a better use of financial and staff resources to focus on providing schools with rapid antigen and LAMP testing, both of which provide same-day results.

Similarly, contact tracing, while useful in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, has outlived its usefulness and can create a false sense of security. Given the current spread of the Omicron strain of COVID-19 in our state and local communities, we all need to understand that we are exposed to COVID-19 every day in every situation. We need to use Universal Precautions to avoid COVID-19 by assuming that all respiratory exhalations are potentially infectious.

Universal Precautions for COVID-19 include:

- Wear a well-fitting mask at all times. KN95's and surgical masks provide better protection than a cloth mask. These masks are available for adults in the Health Office and some KN95's are on order for youth. A surgical mask with a cloth mask over it will provide more protection than a single layer of cloth mask.
- Vaccinate and get boosted! The CDC now recommends a booster for anyone whose last dose of Pfizer or Moderna was more than five (5) months ago, or anyone whose last dose of J&J was more than two (2) months ago.
- Avoid unnecessary close contact and close contact with anyone for more than 15 minutes per day. Maintain a physical distance of at least six (6) feet whenever possible. When eating, eat alone or at a distance from one another, six (6) feet or greater when possible.
- Test before and after social gatherings if you anticipate the possibility of close contact.
- **Students and staff should not be attending school if they have any symptoms associated with COVID-19. Parents should screen their students each day for symptoms and keep them home if symptoms are present.**

If you test positive at any time, contact your Primary Care Provider to discuss your situation. Stay home, isolate, hydrate well, and use supportive care for your other symptoms.

LNSU school nurses have taken delivery of an initial supply of take-home rapid antigen test kits. We expect that we will receive test kits on an ongoing basis depending on supplies available. The direction has been clear that we should use these tests to keep students in school and keep schools open. **In response to symptomatic students or staff in school**, school nurses will have antigen tests to test students on site with parent permission. **Symptomatic students and staff will be instructed to go home from school even if this test is negative.**

At this time, we have been directed generally to use these tests in the following ways:

- Home use for:
  - Families whose children may have been close contacts, regardless of their vaccination status. Parents will test their children at home before sending them to school based on their vaccination status.
  - Staff or students who have tested positive and need to test negative with rapid antigen tests on days 4 & 5 in order to end isolation and return to school/work.
  - Individuals with continuous household exposure, regardless of vaccination status.
- School use in the health office for students or staff who:
  - Develop symptoms while at school. This allows us to identify and isolate positive COVID-19 cases earlier.
  - Are unvaccinated and may have been close contacts, but were not able to test at home.

The Health Office will update the entire district as we learn more about what we can expect with regard to the ongoing supply of take-home test kits. These tests will be distributed based on the winter guidance provided by the VTDOH and VTAOE, which may be refined further over the coming weeks. We will distribute and make maximum use of supplies as supplies last. We also anticipate having a supply of LAMP tests for school use. These tests are as accurate as a PCR, but provide same-day results.

We understand that everyone in the district - parents, staff and students alike - are doing all they can to support our efforts to keep our students and faculty safe, and our schools open. Every day we here at LNSU appreciate the patience, flexibility and efforts of everyone involved.

Please reach out with any questions to your school nurses and/or the District Health Office.

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