

Dear Mercymount Community,

Although this email is a long awaited one, we imagine it will be met with mixed feelings. Undoubtedly, this has been a very long two years, but we believe that the light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter. First, we are very happy to report that we have had ZERO positive Covid-19 cases in the last three weeks! Secondly, as of March 7th, our protocols will be changing.

Positive Covid-19 Cases

We hope that these past few weeks are indicative of a continued downward trend in the positivity rate. For the time being, we will continue to communicate individual cases to the parents of children in the individual classroom in which a student tests positive and a weekly case count to the larger community.

Change in Protocols

As has been our practice, the following protocol decisions were made after consultation and a review of the most recent written guidance. Although meetings with the Department of Health and the Department of Education have not been rescheduled and the K-12 playbook has not been updated at the writing of this, we feel able to provide you with our updated protocols through our conversations with other administrators, school nurses, and written information we received from the Department of Health.

It is our hope that the following changes provide the members of our community with some hope that all is moving in the best direction. As always, we thank you for your support, ideas, and understanding as we continue to negotiate an ever-evolving reality and do our very best to achieve our two major goals: to keep everyone in our school community, especially our children, safe and healthy; and to keep our students in school for optimal learning.

New Protocols - Effective Monday, March 7th

As most are aware, RI Governor Dan McKee's executive order for mask requirement in schools expires this Friday, March 4, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. Therefore, the following changes will be effective starting on March 7th.

Please take time to carefully read Mercymount Country Day's protocol updates below:

- **Masks will be optional** on the whole campus, both indoors and outdoors, for students and staff during school hours. Of course, the choice by any student or staff member to wear a mask during the whole school day, some of the school day, or whenever an individual feels more comfortable doing so, is acceptable. Respect for the choices of families, staff, or students to not wear or wear a mask will be expected. All will be reminded of our continued care for each other at morning prayer before, on, and after March 7th. **(Per the Catholic Athletic League, which governs our sports' rules, optional mask wearing begins on March 5th.)**

- We are very hopeful that we will not see cases rise in school; however, **if community transmission rises or we see more than 5 cases** in one week at school, we will review these policies and update families about any necessary changes.
- Teachers will not be responsible for reminding students to wear a mask or to wear it properly. We ask that you kindly **let your children know of your expectations** regarding mask wearing at school.
- We will **no longer conduct contact tracing** for exposures that occur at school. We have been following the "monitor to stay" program and contacting parents of close contacts. As of March 7th, we will continue to send an email to parents of students in an individual classroom if there is a positive COVID case in their child(ren)'s classroom and ask parents to monitor for symptoms.
- There are **no testing or quarantine requirements for both international and domestic travel**. A test is always recommended if you have been in large crowds or have not tested positive in the past 90 days.
- If **one child is at home with symptoms of COVID and has not tested positive**, siblings may attend school if they are without symptoms.
- If your **child has an exposure OUTSIDE the family** (sports, dance, theatre, etc.), she or he may attend school and be monitored for symptoms. Please see below for family exposures.

Policies/Protocols that Will Remain the Same for Now:

- If your **child tests positive for COVID-19**, she or he will still have to remain home for 5 days. The 5 days begin either from the day of the positive test if asymptomatic, or 5 days from when symptoms started. We will continue to help families with return to school dates like we always have. If students are fever free for 24 hours, and symptoms improve, they may return on day 6, but **MUST** wear a mask at school on days 6-10.
- If a **student presents to the nurse's office with two or more symptoms of COVID**, she or he will be provided with a mask (if the student does not have one), sent home, and asked to obtain a PCR test. If the student tests negative, she or he may return to school once symptoms resolve. Gratefully, PCR test results are coming back very quickly now.
- For **family members who are close contacts**, we will continue to ask students who are not vaccinated and exposed to COVID at home to remain home for 7 days, as well as provide proof of a negative test on day 5 or later (A rapid test from a testing site is still acceptable). Many of our cases since November have been from family "close contacts" and involved students who have not tested positive in the past 90 days or who have not been vaccinated. Again, if your child has had COVID in the past 90 days or is fully vaccinated, then they may attend school.

- **Seating in classrooms and the lunchroom** will remain the same for the time being. Classroom desks are at least 3 feet apart and the lunchroom is 4-8 feet apart depending on the size of the table. We are hoping to change this policy if we do not see cases climb at school over the next few weeks.

- **Ventilation will continue to be key.** Our custodians replaced all the filters in the original ventilation units over Christmas break. In addition, we ordered more units to ensure that we have one in every space in the school where students and staff are working. These will continue to run during the school day, and windows will be open more as the weather improves.

- The main office, nurse's office and classrooms will continue to have **extra child and adult sized masks** for those who request one.

- We will continue to send an email every Friday afternoon with the total number of **COVID cases for that week.**

This does seem like a lot of information at once, but we hope you find this encouraging and positive. We know this is still a fluid situation, and we will continue to communicate any changes we hear from the RI Department of Health and the RI Department of Education.

As always, please reach out with any questions.

Healthy regards,
Nurse Kellie and Gina with Sr. Rayleen

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