

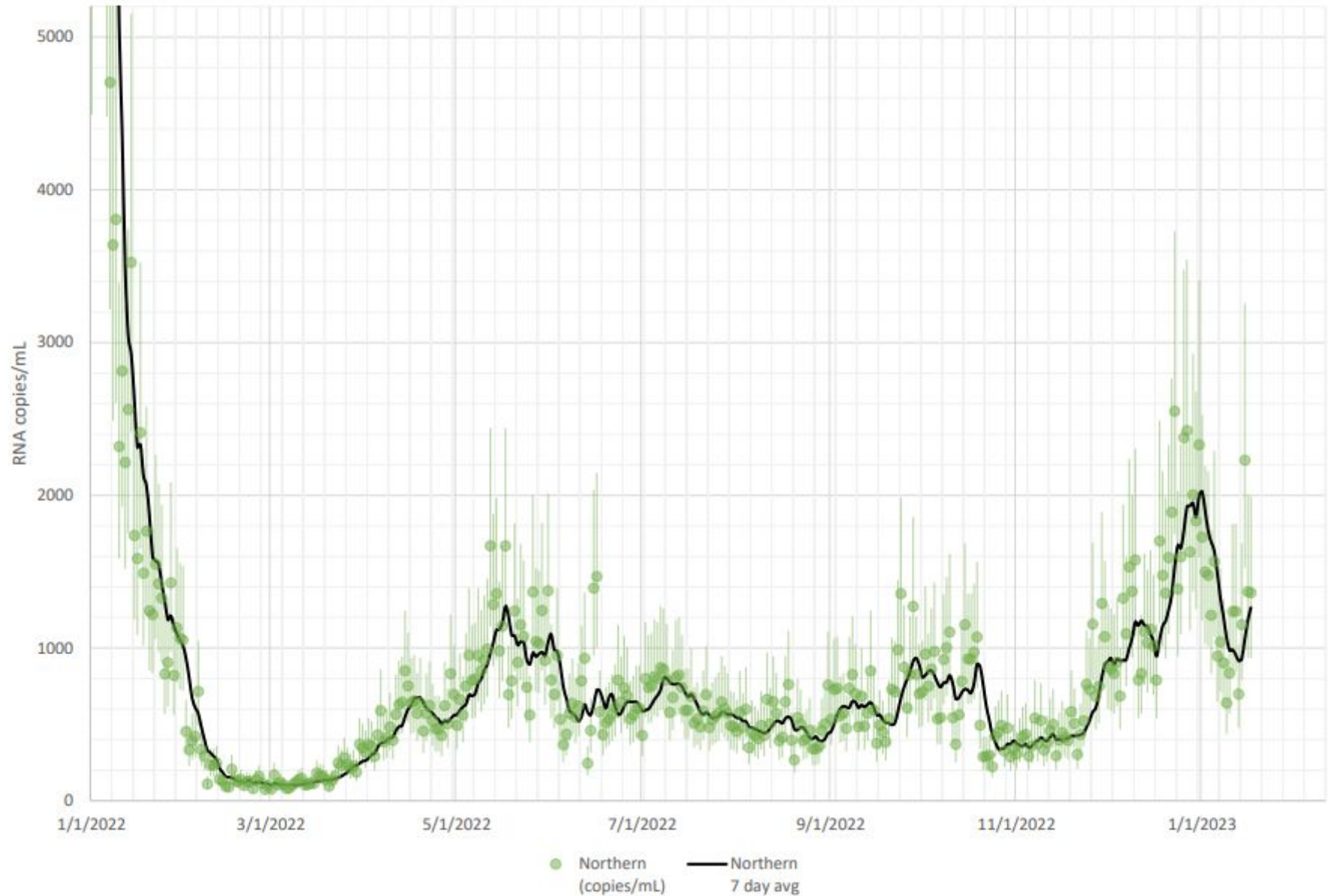
Public Health Update

January 2023

What is happening in our community?

- COVID-19 in wastewater samples is currently trending down, with some variation. So far this winter season they never approached the levels from this time period last year (~**13,000 copies per mL** at the start of January 2022 v ~**2,000** copies per mL at the start of January 2023)
- Middlesex County is currently in the “Yellow” or Medium Risk CDC COVID-19 Risk Category
- Confirmed COVID-19 cases reported to the City of Somerville from MDPH are trending down
- Public health officials say RSV has peaked and Flu is also trending down. We had confirmed cases of Flu at SPS during the first two weeks of December, saw an attendant rise in absences, and notified families at the affected schools. Absences are now back to pre-December levels, but we continue to monitor.

Recent North System RNA Signal by Date



What is happening in SPS?

- COVID-19 cases among students and staff at SPS increased after we returned to school in January, but have not spiked. Last year, we had 812 cases reported during the first two weeks of January, even with a mask mandate in place. This year, we had 54 cases reported during the same time period: [Somerville Public Schools COVID-19 Dashboard](#)
- Somerville Public Schools are unique in continuing to monitor and report positive cases: most school districts don't. This gives us a more complete picture of what is happening in our district.

What else is different this year?

- The vast majority of the population has some immunity to COVID-19, whether from infection, vaccination or both. For most people, COVID is a mild illness.
- Even before COVID, it was “normal” to see an increase in respiratory illnesses and absences in the winter months. As Shira Doron, infectious disease physician at Tufts Medical Center, explained in the Boston Globe recently, COVID has become similar to other respiratory viruses and should be treated as such. It is now one of the many illnesses we may come into contact with.
- Context of COVID and children.

What are we doing?

- We continue with our layered mitigation strategies in school: increased ventilation and filtration, rapid COVID testing in the school nurses' offices for any symptomatic student or staff member, tracking and monitoring of cases, wide availability of masks, providing at-home tests to use before returning to school and targeted mask mandates in classrooms/grades where clusters have been identified.
- We sent out messages to families and staff on Jan. 2 and Jan. 3 and on social media strongly advising masks for the first two weeks of January. We will continue to monitor trends, but do not anticipate extending the mask advisory at this time.
- We will work with our Communications Department to continue to refine our plan and adapt messaging as necessary.