# COVID Update & Masking

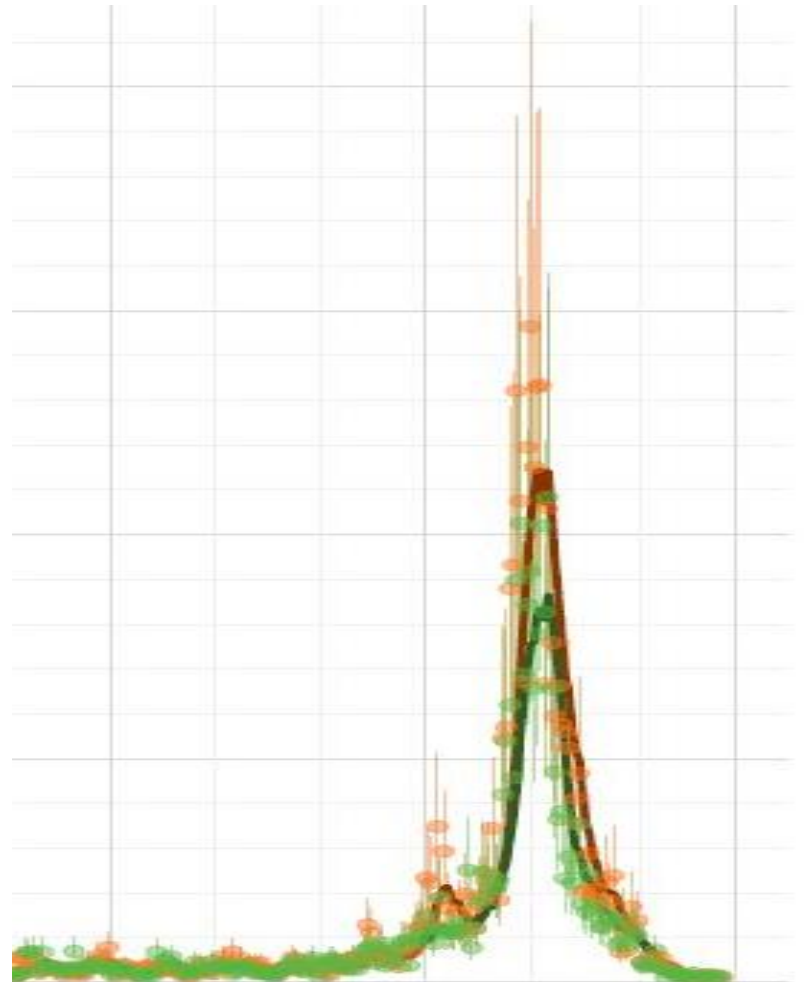# Omicron

- Happened as predicted

- Incredible amount of work on staying open
  - Staff and admin
  - Students
  - Parents
  - Everyone, community

**Wed. Jan. 12, 2022**

**24,296** reported cases
**23,793** 7-day avg.

7-day avg.

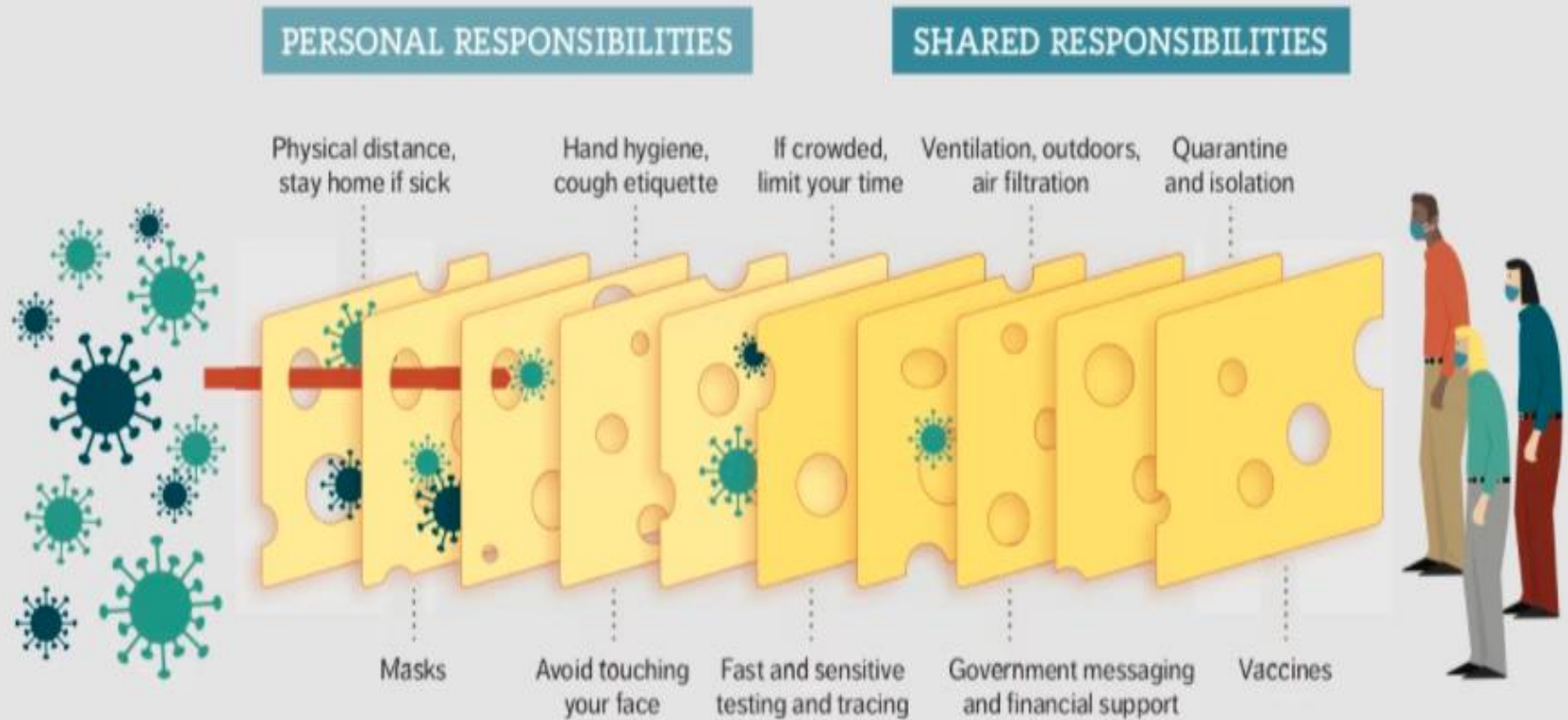Oct.                    Feb. 28, 2022

# Where are we now?

- Metrics
  - Cases, hospitalizations, deaths declining
    - To pre-Omicron levels and falling
  - Wastewater falling

- Currently, no new variants on the horizon

# Swiss Cheese Mitigations



THE SWISS CHEESE MODEL

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

Physical distance, stay home if sick

Hand hygiene, cough etiquette

If crowded, limit your time

Ventilation, outdoors, air filtration

Quarantine and isolation

Masks

Avoid touching your face

Fast and sensitive testing and tracing

Government messaging and financial support

Vaccines

Source: Adapted from Ian M. Mackay (virologydownunder.com) and James T. Reason

# Masking – Yes it does help!

- Lots of debate
  - Mask type
  - Does masking work?

- COVID
  - Transmitted by droplet and opportunistic aerosol
  - ALL masks work very well against droplet
  - Variable performance against aerosol
    - 50% cloth, 70% medical, 94% KF-94,
    - 95% N95 (not approved for kids)

# Where are we going?

- Lots of talk about endemic?
  - "infection is constantly maintained at a baseline level in a geographic area without external inputs."
  - Flu, RSV are endemic..
  - Unclear this is true for COVID yet (?)

- What is clear now (and next 3-9 months ??):
  - Very low level of virus circulating in community
  - Very high level of natural immunity from having a case
  - Very high level of vaccination in adults (that protects kids) in community
  - Vaccination is holding against hospitalizations and death

- Next step:
  - Is a Pandemic Pause… which leads to the question:
  - What levels of the Swiss Cheese can we (should we) drop?

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# COVID-19 County Check

Find community levels and prevention steps by county.

Select a Location (all fields required)

| Massachusetts ⌄ | Middlesex County ⌄ | Go |

< Start Over

🟢 **Low**

In **Middlesex County, Massachusetts**, community level is **Low**.

- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines

- Get tested if you have symptoms

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People may choose to mask at any time. People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask.

If you are immunocompromised, learn more about how to protect yourself.

February 24, 2022

# Why mask-optional first?

- Masks are one Swiss Cheese Layer
  - Important when transmission is high

- Masks also:
  - Make communication harder
  - Make emotional communication harder
  - Make comprehension harder
  - Are difficult for some students to wear (sensitivity)
  - Can be esp. tough for youngest / special needs
  - There are drawbacks to masks

- Need to compare "risk of masks" and "risk of COVID"

# What about vaccination?

- Vacc~~ination in <12's by~~ du~~~~
  - B~~
  - 5~~
  - <~~

  - Issues balancing dose to get antibody response and side-effects (also much lower COVID risk)

We protect our un(under-) vaccinated <12's by:

- Adult vaccination

- Keeping virus levels low in community

# Adjusting to COVID Mitigation Changes

- This is a big adjustment
  - For some, it is a very happy adjustment
  - For some, it is a very scary adjustment

- Masking is *visible* sign of mitigation
  - In areas with low "trust" around you, masks help you trust community.

- At very low virus prevalence, masks are unneeded, but this is harder to trust.

# What about more at-risk people?

- There are people who are at more risk of/from respiratory diseases (including COVID).

- For these people, we:
  - Maintain environmental controls (HVAC, etc.)
  - Maintain social controls
    - Testing, not coming to school when sick
  - Normalize support for individual masking
    - One-way masking in high-quality masks is efficacious

# Recommendations

Based on current state of COVID, data, and recommendations, current recommendations:

1. Move to mask optional policy in SPS
   - Deliberately and considering socio-emotional of all SPS members through this adaptation to COVID

1. Closely watch variants and numbers
   - Have rapid mechanism to come back to masking if needed (e.g. new variant)

# Thank you!

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