

COVID-19

What to expect this school year?

Many school-based mitigations will remain in place:

- Increased ventilation
- Symptomatic rapid testing available
- At-home tests available for vacation periods and as needed based on public health official guidance
- Masks optional, but available for staff and students
- [Isolation and Quarantine guidelines](#) per DESE and MDPH (subject to change)

What has changed?

- SPS student vaccination rate is over 71%, Staff vaccination is over 95%, plus many have some immunity from infection
- Vaccination has been expanded to include everyone ages 6 months and up
- Multiple treatments options are now available for higher-risk individuals
- Hospitalization and mortality rates are lower than with previous surges and the illness continues to be mild for the vast majority of people
- Most community-based precautions have been lifted (ie: masks no longer required on public transportation, airplanes, restaurants) and many people are traveling and socializing.

COVID-19 Testing

In consultation with public health officials, DESE discontinued all state-run testing programs at the end of SY 21-22. That means no more pool testing and no more biweekly distribution of at-home self test kits. Instead, we will offer:

- **Symptomatic Testing:** The district will continue to support symptomatic testing for students and staff. Individuals who become symptomatic during the school day can go to the school nurse to be tested with a rapid antigen test.
- **Consent for Testing:** Parents/Guardians will need to fill out new COVID testing consent forms. The link is available on the SPS website: [COVID-19 Testing Consent Form](#) and was sent home to families in the Superintendent's letter on 8/24/22.

- **At-home Self-Tests:** These kits will be distributed before vacation and on an as-needed basis in consultation with local and state public health officials. Self-tests are widely available at drug stores and insurance will cover the cost.
- **Reporting:** For now, we will continue to ask staff and students to report positive at-home results via the SPS online form.
<https://somerville.k12.ma.us/district-departments/nursing-schools/covid-testing>
- **Monitoring:** DESE no longer requires school districts to report positive cases to the state. For now, we will continue to report cases for SPS staff and students on a public dashboard.

Communication with Families

- In the event of an outbreak, or an exposure that is concerning (special needs classroom, SKIP, unusual severity of illness), we may notify a classroom or grade and will work with the principal and school nurse on messaging.

Masking

- Masks will be available for staff (KN95) and students (surgical) but not required (subject to change). To obtain more masks or supplies such as hand sanitizer or gloves, contact Katherine Santiago in the Superintendent's office or fill out the monthly PPE ordering form.
- In the event of a cluster of cases, the School Committee allows for the temporary reinstatement of a mask mandate in specific classrooms, buildings or grades. We will determine when to temporarily require masks in collaboration with the school nurse.
- Visitors can be offered masks.

Meetings/Performances/Celebrations/Parent Visits

- Masks should be offered to visitors and participants.
- DESE lifted social distancing requirements at the end of the last school year, but it is prudent to open windows or use air filtration as much as possible. HEPA filter machines only need to be used in schools without central HVAC or access to outdoor air exchange..
- Musical performances, dances, celebrations should be held outside if possible and windows should be open as weather permits.
- Parents can visit the school nurse in the nurse's office to drop off medication or meet with the nurse about medical issues. Face coverings are required in the nurse's office

Vaccination

Vaccination remains the best protection against severe disease, offers protection against infection and helps to prevent the development of new variants. The SPS COVID-19 vaccination rate varies between schools and generally increases with each grade level.

Please note: We learned about positive cases in multiple ways: from pool, reflex and symptomatic testing at school; the MDPH database; and self-reported at home tests. The available data may not reflect the true infection rate. The vast majority of cases were self-reported at home tests.

Last year, we held 17 school-based COVID-19 vaccination clinics. This year, we will focus on promoting vaccination among the under and un-immunized members of the community and will look to our community partners for assistance in reaching vaccine resistant groups. While many members of the SPS community have completed the primary series of vaccination, many of those eligible for boosters have not received them.