

8/25/2021

Wellesley Public Schools COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies for SY2021-22

**1. What PK-12 health and safety protocols are being recommended now by health experts and key decision-makers in light of the Delta variant of the virus?**

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- **The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)** recommends COVID-19 vaccination for all adolescents 12 years of age and older who do not have contraindications for the vaccine. All students older than 2 years and all school staff should wear face masks at school regardless of vaccination status (unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit use.)
- **The MA Department of Public Health (DPH) and MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)** recommend that:
  - All students in K-6 wear masks when indoors, except students who cannot do so due to medical conditions or behavioral needs. Masks are not necessary outdoors and may be removed while eating indoors.
  - Unvaccinated staff in all grades, unvaccinated students in grades 7 and above, and unvaccinated visitors wear masks indoors.

***Update: The MA State Board of Education voted on 8/24/21 to give authority to the Commissioner of Education to require indoor masking in schools through the month of September.***

**2. What masking rules will WPS follow in the upcoming school year?**

- The Wellesley School Committee unanimously approved the WPS Administration's proposed start-of-school COVID-19 mitigation strategies on Tuesday, August 24th. This includes the requirement to wear masks indoors through the month of September.
- The Wellesley Board of Health approved a similar resolution at its meeting on Monday, August 23rd.
- All students and staff will begin the year wearing masks while indoors, regardless of vaccination status. This decision will be revisited with the Wellesley Board of Health in early October based on start-of-school data, the trajectory of the virus, and any additional guidance from the state.

- 3. I am vaccinated. Will I need to wear a mask in the upcoming school year?**
  - Yes, everyone will be wearing masks while indoors at school--regardless of vaccination status-- for at least the first month of school.
  
- 4. Are there any exemptions from the mask mandate?**
  - Exemptions will be permitted for documented medical or behavioral issues.
  - Vaccinated staff may lower their masks if they are alone in their classrooms or offices.
  
- 5. Will WPS require physical distancing when we return to school?**
  - There are no physical distancing requirements in place this year from the state, even during meals. Schools will, however, support outdoor lunches when weather permits and attempt to distance during indoor lunches as feasible.
  
- 6. Will there be a remote learning option for students this year?**
  - The district will not be offering a fully remote learning option for families as this has not been approved by the state.
  - As of now, any longer term absences will be supported as they were prior to the pandemic.
  
- 7. Will there be assigned seating this year?**
  - In order to conduct contact tracing as needed, the district will employ assigned seating when feasible. Current state guidance does not require assigned seating on buses.
  
- 8. My child is immunocompromised and in-person learning does not feel safe to me. Is there a remote option this year?**
  - As noted in the Updates to DESE COVID-19 Guidance released on May 27, 2021, all districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week this fall.
  - Pathways that existed prior to the pandemic for offering virtual learning to individual students in limited cases will remain available to districts and schools. These include home/hospital tutoring programs due to a documented medical condition. If your child medically requires in-home tutoring, please complete one of the attached forms and return it to the school nurse.

[Physician's Affirmation of Need for Temporary Home or Hospital Education for Medically Necessary Reasons](#)

[Absent for more than 60 days](#)

**9. Can WPS disclose the vaccination status of individual teachers, students, or classes?**

- No, this is protected information.

**10. WPS participated in COVID-19 surveillance testing during SY2020-21. Will the district participate in a COVID-19 testing program again this year?**

- WPS has applied to and been accepted into the state testing program. The district plans to use this program to offer on-site, rapid/antigen testing for students and staff who exhibit COVID symptoms while at school.
- Additionally, the district will employ a “test and stay” approach, allowing asymptomatic close contacts the ability to stay in school while they are being tested each day for 5-7 days.
- The district is not planning on participating in wide-scale surveillance testing to begin the school year, but will monitor our school community data closely and may shift to include asymptomatic pool testing if necessary. If used, surveillance testing this year would likely involve on-site nasal swabbing.

**11. Is there any plan to close individual classrooms or schools this year based on cases?**

- There is currently no state provision allowing districts to close classrooms or schools based on case counts or other metrics.

**12. What is the current definition of a “close contact” and what steps are required of close contacts once school begins?**

- Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated.

**13. Is anyone exempt from quarantining if they are identified as a close contact?**

- The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:
  - **Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts:** Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.

- **Classroom close contacts:** An individual who is exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom while both individuals were masked, so long as the individuals were spaced at least 3 feet apart, is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Bus close contacts:** Individuals on buses must be masked according to federal requirements. As such, individuals who are masked on buses when windows are open are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days:** An individual who has been previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and then becomes a close contact of someone with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols if:
  - The exposure occurred within 90 days of the onset of their own illness AND
  - The exposed individual is recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms.

**14. Are all Wellesley Public Schools staff members required to be vaccinated?**

- Currently, there is no mandate for staff members to be vaccinated. To date, staff vaccination rates are nearly 90 percent.

**15. What about volunteers?**

- WPS will likely start the year with limited building access to the public to reduce the risk of transmission in buildings.
- Decisions about requirements and protocols for volunteers will be made after the start of the year.

**16. Will WPS host another vaccination clinic? If yes, when?**

- During the spring, WPS hosted two vaccination clinics. Given the wide availability of the vaccine to anyone eligible right now, WPS is not planning on hosting another vaccination clinic until eligibility expands to students under the age of 12 and/or booster shots have been approved for those already vaccinated.
- The vaccination rates for eligible students at WPS exceeds 80% as of 8.14.2021.

**17. Will masks be required on WPS school buses and vans?**

- Yes. By federal public health order, all students and staff are required to wear masks on school buses at this time. (DESE/DPH COVID-19 Guidance for Districts and Schools: Fall 2021)

**18. What are the health and safety rules for the Wellesley Performing Arts?**

- To date, the state has not released guidance for performing arts, but we expect to receive additional information very shortly, which we will share.

**19. Will field trips be supported this year?**

- WPS hopes to be able to support field trips later in the year but these opportunities will likely be limited in the early fall.

**20. What are the current travel restrictions? Will I be able to travel out of state without a quarantine?**

- In Massachusetts, if you are fully vaccinated, you can resume activities that you did prior to the pandemic. Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing themselves, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.
  - For the most up to date information please visit:
    - [Mass.gov Covid-19 Travel Advisory](#)

**21. If a student or staff member is sick and experiencing symptoms, such as fever, cough, runny nose, what should they do?**

- Students, faculty, and staff are directed to stay home if they are sick. If an individual presents to school with the above-mentioned symptoms, they will need to go home until clearance criteria for school return is met.
- Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves.
- Unvaccinated individuals and any close contacts presenting these symptoms should follow testing and quarantine response protocols as outlined by WPS. Vaccinated individuals who are not close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols if they are experiencing symptoms in **bold**. These individuals may also seek clinical guidance to assess the need for PCR testing if they have other symptoms on this list.
  - **COVID-19 symptoms list:**
    - **Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills**
    - **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
    - **New loss of taste or smell**
    - **Muscle aches or body aches**

- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Sore throat, *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Fatigue, *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms*

**23. How do I report an absence for my child?**

- In the event that your child will be absent, tardy, or dismissed, an absence reporting link will be available on the homepage of your child's school.

**24. Will we ever get to attend school without strict health and safety measures in place?**

- We certainly hope so, but for now we must continue to adhere to the safety protocols that will allow us to maintain in-person learning safely across our district.