

## **RSU 26 Safe Return to School COVID Guidelines**

*“Schools and early care and education (ECE) programs are an important part of the infrastructure of communities as they provide safe, supportive learning environments for students and children and enable parents and caregivers to be at work. Schools and ECE programs like Head Start also provide critical services that help to mitigate health disparities, such as school lunch programs, and social, physical, behavioral, and mental health services.”*

From CDC Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-childcare-guidance.html>)

*“Many people in the United States have some protection, or immunity, against COVID-19 due to vaccination, previous infection, or both. This immunity, combined with the availability of tests and treatments, has greatly reduced the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 for many people. At the same time, some people—such as those who are older, are immunocompromised, have certain disabilities, or have certain underlying health conditions—continue to be at higher risk for serious illness. Learn more about the factors that can affect your risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 to better understand how COVID-19 could affect you and others around you.*

From CDC Community Levels

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>)

*“Widespread uptake of COVID-19 vaccines that are highly effective against severe illness and death, the accrual of high rates of vaccine and infection-induced immunity at the population level, and the availability of effective therapeutics have moved the pandemic to a different phase.”*

From CDC Science Brief: Indicators for Monitoring COVID-19 Community Levels and Making Public Health Recommendations

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/indicators-monitoring-community-levels.html>)

**RSU 26 will continue to prioritize a positive, engaged school experience in compliance with US CDC guidelines on preventative measures and comply with state CDC guidance on responses to identified cases as our main guidance on school operations.**

## **Social & Academic Support**

Students continue to have significant social, emotional and academic needs as a result of COVID. The district remains committed to providing increased levels of support and to monitoring and meeting changing needs.

Although the schools will continue to remain prepared to switch to hybrid or remote if the circumstances demand it, including technology readiness, this will not be a primary focus of planning for Academic Year 2022-2023. At a minimum, instructional staff should update Google Classroom/SeeSaw at least weekly.

## Safety Measures

The following safety measures will be in place for Fall 2022:

1. **Vaccinations** - The district continues to encourage vaccination as a highly effective means of reducing risk and will continue to provide vaccination clinics when demand exists.
2. **Testing** - state provided pooled testing was terminated in May 2022 in favor of the medically more beneficial use of rapid home tests when symptoms arise. The school will continue to support state programs to share home tests and help in obtaining tests when families need support.
3. **Ventilation** - the schools will continue the robust ventilation program already in place ensuring that classrooms have many air changes per hour of preferably fresh outside air or, when cold temperatures require it, MERV 13 filtered air. HEPA air filters will remain in classrooms and use of open windows and outdoor class time as weather allows is encouraged.
4. **Hygiene** - students and staff are expected to continue to use frequent handwashing/hand sanitizer and mouth/nose covering during coughs and sneezes. High availability of hand sanitizer will continue.
5. **Stay home when sick and when feeling symptoms** - students and staff continue to be expected to stay home when COVID-like symptoms appear unless at home testing indicates return is safe. If any doubt remains, wearing a mask while symptoms continue is strongly encouraged.
6. **Cleaning protocols** - a focus on cleaning shared surfaces once a day will continue by RSU26 custodial services.
7. **Positive case protocols** - the schools will continue to follow US CDC guidance on quarantining and isolation (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>). (At the present time these include quarantining/isolating for 5 days if you test positive for COVID. All sick individuals and close exposures should wear masks when not in isolation until 10 days out from onset of symptoms or exposure.) The schools will also continue to follow state protocols on infectious disease reporting, tracking, and responding to outbreaks (<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/healthed/nurseresources/manual/com municable>). This includes that individuals should report COVID cases to their school & the school nurse.
8. **Masks** - high quality masks (e.g. KN94 or N95) provide a good level of protection to the individual wearing them. The district will continue to support mask wearing by individuals who wish to do so. We will continue to communicate clear expectations that all people

who choose to wear masks will be supported in their choice. High quality masks will be available to staff and can be provided to students who need them. CDC guidance leaves setting mask requirements to local communities based on local conditions with an emphasis on acute cases (i.e. hospitalization) rather than number of cases.

Unfortunately acute cases are tracked at a 4-county level for our area, causing us to focus on more local metrics. Thus the present policy of masks being optional will remain in place until one of the following occurs:

- a. There are strong signs of in-school spread. This could include case levels in the schools (or a part of a school) that are noticeably higher than an appropriate (i.e. equal levels of testing) comparison to the community levels. This will also depend on school nurse assessment of new cases and their likely sources
- b. There are new virus variants that present increased risk of serious health consequences
- c. CDC guidance changes

## Special events

Broadly all special activities will return more closely to normal, but parent and community participation in the schools and participation in higher risk activities like indoor sports and singing will continue to be handled on a case-by-case basis by school administrators based on CDC guidance. High community levels of spread, large events, and high risk activities may continue to lead to more limitations on specific activities and events than described above for general student school participation.