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Memo

To: Pre K-12 School Administrators
From: Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)
Date: January 6, 2022
Subject: Guidance Updates for COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in Pre K-12 Schools

COVID-19 spread inside schools remains limited due to strong, layered prevention strategies in a structured setting. However, COVID-19 cases are surging statewide, and across the country, due to highly contagious Delta and Omicron variants and activities moving indoors during the winter. School-aged children have had some of the highest case numbers among all Rhode Islanders over the recent weeks. Find up-to-date data and trends at covid.ri.gov/kidsdata.

In response to the surge in cases and updated CDC data and guidance, we've updated our recommendations for layered COVID-19 prevention in Pre K-12 schools. We recommend that schools implement these changes by January 10, 2022. Our priority remains keeping children learning in person safely.

HIGHLIGHTS

In line with CDC recommendations and local data and experience with schools, RIDOH recommends

- **Shortening isolation and quarantine** duration for students and staff to 5 days;
- **Streamlining case investigation and contact tracing** for students and staff;
- Implementing the **Monitor to Stay quarantine program** for those students and staff who aren't exempt from quarantine in order to maximize in-person learning; and
- **Waiving the requirement for a negative test result** for close contacts to end quarantine.

Updated Guidance Regarding Quarantine and Isolation for Students and Staff in Pre K-12 Schools

In line with CDC guidance, Rhode Island has updated guidance for the general public regarding isolation, quarantine, masking, and testing. National data has reinforced the importance of masking and getting vaccinated and boosted, particularly to protect against the highly contagious Omicron variant.

Building upon the updated guidance for the general public, local data, and local experience with COVID-19 mitigation in schools, we recommend that

- **Students and staff who either have, or develop, symptoms should isolate at home, contact a healthcare provider, and get tested.**
- **Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19**, regardless of their vaccination status, should stay home and isolate for at least 5 days. Then they may
 - Return to school on day 6, if they don't have symptoms or their symptoms are improving, and they've been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication). They should wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days at school, at home, and with others; or
 - Isolate at home until their symptoms are improving and they've been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication). They should wear a well-fitting mask at school and at home for the remainder of the 10-day period from symptom onset or specimen collection date if they are asymptomatic.
- **Case investigation and contact tracing efforts are streamlined** to focus on collecting the minimum information required to quickly notify close contacts and respond accordingly.
 - RIDOH will focus on shortened case interviews and identifying household contacts.
 - Schools should focus on identifying and notifying close contacts who were exposed at school.
 - The simplest method of communication that works for each school community should be used to notify close contacts and start the Monitor to Stay quarantine program.
 - Close contact lists will not be provided to RIDOH.

- **Staff and students age 18 and older who are identified as close contacts are exempt from quarantine and should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days**, if they don't have symptoms and have
 - Received a vaccine booster dose;
 - Completed the two-dose primary series of Pfizer within the last 5 months;
 - Completed the two-dose primary series of Moderna within the last 6 months; or
 - Completed the one-dose primary series of J&J vaccine in the last 2 months.

* If they develop symptoms, they should isolate at home and get tested.

- **Students age 5-17 who are identified as close contacts are exempt from quarantine and should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days**, if they have don't have symptoms and have
 - Completed the two-dose primary series of Pfizer or Moderna more than 14 days prior the exposure date.

* If they develop symptoms, they should isolate at home and get tested.

- **Students and staff without symptoms, who are identified as close contacts, and aren't exempt from quarantine are encouraged to follow the Monitor to Stay quarantine protocol**, which allows students and staff to attend school in person and participate in school-related extracurricular activities during their quarantine period. Household close contacts are not eligible. In this case, they should
 - Conduct symptom screening and attest that they don't have symptoms for 5 days;
 - Wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days; and
 - Follow quarantine guidance when outside school, as well as updated CDC guidance about masking.

- Athletic programs should continue current testing programs for sports.

- **Students and staff identified as close contacts are exempt from quarantine if they don't have symptoms and one of the following exemptions applies:**
 - The person previously had COVID-19 no more than 90 days prior to the last date of close contact exposure; or
 - The person meets all of the **Pre K-12 close contact exception** criteria:
 - The close contact and infected person are both pre K-12 students;

- The exposure occurred inside a pre K-12 classroom or structured outdoor pre K-12 setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with supervision);
 - Both students wore face masks at all times; and
 - Students were at least 3 feet apart from each other at all times; or
- The person is a pre K-12 student or staff member and the exposure occurred at **outdoor recess** at a pre K-12 school; or
 - The exposure occurred on a pre K-12 **school bus** where windows were open, all persons on the bus wore face masks, and there was at least one other adult in addition to the driver present to monitor that masks were worn and windows were open.

Promoting Vaccination

Vaccination remains the most powerful strategy to keep children and families healthy and students learning and involved in extracurricular activities in person. Find more information at C19vaccineRI.org.

RIDOH strongly encourages all eligible students, staff, and families get vaccinated and boosted. **Since the start of school, 91% of the students with COVID-19 infection were unvaccinated.**

Vaccination remains the best strategy to keep children in-school. **Students and staff who aren't showing symptoms and are up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination are exempt from quarantine.**

Note: LEAs are encouraged to consider Centers for Disease Prevention & Control (CDC) and RIDOH recommendations when implementing COVID-19 prevention strategies in schools, as well as current applicable laws: [federal law](#) requiring masks on public transportation, such as school buses, and Executive Order requiring universal indoor [masking](#) in public K-12 schools.