School Health Services
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Dear Boston Public School Community,

As we approach the winter season, we would like to remind our students, families and staff of the importance of maintaining a safe, healthy, and welcoming school environment for all. In addition to COVID-19, the months of October and November have presented a number of cases of Influenza A and RSV, along with other prevalent winter illnesses. We share a responsibility in protecting and maintaining the health of our students, staff, and community.

Preventing the spread of illness for you and your family begins with everyday key practices, such as staying up-to-date with your vaccines, staying home when sick, testing for COVID-19 before gathering with family and friends, wearing a well-fitted mask while traveling through airports and train stations, covering your nose and mouth especially while coughing, and hand washing. It is important to wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or shirt sleeve when coughing or sneezing.

You can help prevent the spread of illness by ensuring you and your family are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines and boosters, and yearly flu vaccines as soon as possible. Please take the opportunity to vaccinate yourself and your students. Getting vaccinated will make school safer for everyone, and in case you or your child get sick, staying home can prevent others from getting sick, too. The Boston Public Health Commission is offering free, walk-in COVID-19 and flu vaccines, as well as COVID-19 testing for people of all ages at the Bruce C. Bolling Building in Nubian Square, from Tuesdays through Saturdays, 12-8PM. No ID or insurance is required. Finally, we want to remind students and staff that covering one's nose and mouth with a mask while indoors is an effective strategy to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses in our schools. BPS continues to encourage those wishing to wear a mask to do so. Masks are available for all students and staff.

The BPS COVID-19 Home Health Checklist can be useful in determining when it is necessary to stay home. Many of the current illnesses can resemble a common cold, making it difficult for parents to decide whether to send their child to school or an employee making a decision on when to attend work. The decision to keep your child at home with mild symptoms, often presents with other challenges and we are sensitive to the matter. However, keeping mildly sick kids home is critically important in keeping our schools safely open. We ask that you strictly follow the BPS COVID-19 Home Health Checklist and COVID-19 protocols and consult your primary care provider.

We continue to encourage members of the BPS community to get tested regularly for COVID-19. Please stay home and get tested for COVID-19 if you or your child is experiencing the following:

- Fever or chills
- Difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste/smell
- Muscle or body aches
- Cough (not due to another known cause) or nausea/vomiting/diarrhea, sore throat, fatigue, headache, or nasal congestion- when in combination with other symptoms

Due to the nature of respiratory illnesses at this time, please seek further guidance from your healthcare provider, if your child is ill and tests negative for COVID-19, as there are other viruses of concern.

Below are some additional guidelines to help families and employees decide when it is necessary to stay home. If an individual is experiencing any of the following symptoms, we ask parents to keep your child home, and for employees to stay home for 24 hours after symptoms resolve:

- **Fever** — *Temperature of 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit or higher*. Students need to stay home

for 24 hours after his/her temperature has returned to normal without any fever reducing medications, such as Ibuprofen or Acetaminophen.

- **Diarrhea** — *Three or more loose or watery stools in a 24-hour period, especially if the person feels ill.* Students or employees should stay home for 24 hours after the last watery stool.
- **Vomiting** — *Two or more times during the last 24-hours, especially if the person feels ill.* Students or employees should stay home for 24 hours after the last time he/she vomited.
- **Persistent Coughing** — *Could be caused by many illnesses.* Students or employees experiencing persistent coughing should see their primary care provider and stay home until it is resolved.
- **Fatigue** — *Symptoms include lingering tiredness, paleness, lack of appetite, difficult time waking, confusion and irritability.* Student or employee should stay home until he/she is well, or has seen his or her primary care provider.
- **Strep Throat or Bacterial Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye) —** *Illnesses for which primary care providers have diagnosed and prescribed treatment***.** Must stay home 24 hours after the first dose of antibiotics.

If any of the above symptoms appear while at school, please call to have the student picked up or arrange for the staff member to go home. We suggest that a primary healthcare provider also be consulted. Please contact the school nurse or healthcare provider if you are unsure whether or not school should be missed due to health conditions. Remember to report the reasons the child or employee is absent to school staff as early as possible.

For the most up-to-date information on health and safety work in BPS schools visit the BPS website. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact BPS Health Services at (617) 635-6788. For additional tips and resources, please visit the BPS Health Services Department website.

Sincerely,

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