

# 2/14/22 - Change to mask requirements starting Feb. 22

[Espanol](#)

Hello district families and staff members,

Thank you for your help in mitigating COVID-19 in our school community. Our combined efforts are making a difference and have allowed us to remain in school in-person this year, even as cases rose sharply in early January after Winter Break.

Over the course of the last couple of weeks we have worked to update our mitigation plan as our absenteeism rate of both our students and staff members has continued to trend downward. In fact, we have observed that our overall absenteeism rate due to illness has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, we are now at a point at which students and staff members have broad access to vaccines, boosters and COVID-19 tests.

Because of these variables, we are confident in our ability to transition away from a broad, district-wide requirement to a more focused school-by-school face covering/mask decision-making model based on student absence rates (specifically, illness).

The school-by-school face covering/mask decision-making model will have three tiers based on each school's absence rates using the three-day mid-week average of student absences due to illness.

- Not Required (Green)
  - Schools will be in the Not Required (Green) threshold when their building absence average is below 3.5%
- Strongly Recommended (Yellow)
  - Schools will reach the Strongly Recommended (Yellow) threshold when their building absence average is 3.6-7%
- Required (Red)
  - Schools will reach the Required (Red) threshold when their building absence average exceeds 7%. Staff and students at sites that are in the Required (Red) threshold will be required to wear a well-fitted mask for the following week.

With this new tiered approach in place, the following changes to our mitigation strategies will go into effect on Tuesday, February 22, 2022.

## **Face coverings/masks**

- Face coverings/masks are recommended and not required for all persons at all EC-12+ grade levels in the district, unless the following conditions are present:
  - the spread of COVID-19 is above 50 cases per 100,000 at the county level, AND
  - the three-day mid-week average of the school site's student absences due to illness exceeds 7%, double the district's pre-COVID three-year average from January and February.
- Those students, staff and visitors who choose to remain masked regardless of their building's tier are welcome to do so.
- Extended Day programming will follow the same guidelines as the EC-12+ buildings.
- Face coverings/masks are recommended but not required for activities outside of school hours in district buildings.
- Face coverings will not be required outdoors, regardless of the face covering/mask tier level in effect at the school.
- ***Regardless of the face covering/mask tier level in place at a building, face coverings/masks will continue to be required in the following situations:***
  - Face coverings/masks will remain required on student transportation. This is a federal requirement that will expire March 18, 2022, unless otherwise extended.
  - Individual elementary classes may also be required to mask based on the number of COVID-19 cases in the classroom.
  - Students who have symptoms of COVID-19 will be required to wear a mask in the health office during the time they are waiting to be picked up.
  - Unvaccinated staff and students who are household contacts can return on day six of a COVID-19 quarantine. Regardless of the face covering/mask model in effect at their school, they will be required to wear a well-fitted mask through their specified day 10. We strongly recommend an antigen test (i.e. Binax) be used until testing negative during days 6-10. Face covering exemptions will not be applied to days 6-10.
  - Vaccinated staff and students who are household COVID-19 contacts do not need to quarantine. Regardless of the face covering/mask model in effect at their school, they will be required to wear a well-fitted mask through their specified day 10. We strongly recommend an antigen test (i.e. Binax) be used until testing negative during days 6-10. Face covering exemptions will not be applied to days 6-10.
  - Positive COVID-19 staff can return on day six of a COVID-19 quarantine. Regardless of the face covering/mask model in effect at their school, they will be required to wear a well-fitted mask through their specified day 10. Face covering exemptions will not be applied to days 6-10.
  - Positive COVID-19 students can return to school on or after day 6 with a negative antigen test (i.e. Binax). Regardless of the face covering/mask model in effect at their school they will be required to wear a well-fitted mask through their specified day 10. Face covering exemptions will not be applied to days 6-10.

## Communication and Notification

- At the district level, White Bear Lake Area Schools will share the status of the masking requirements on the district's COVID-19 Info & Dashboard, which will be updated each Friday at 6 p.m. with tier data from that week.
- Beginning Feb. 18, families will receive notice at 6 p.m. on Fridays if their child's school reaches the Red tier and masks are required for the following week. Notification will be sent by email and voicemail from the building principal. Those who have opted in to receive text messages from the district will also receive a text notification. Families who do not receive a Friday notification about changing face/covering mask requirement may assume their child's school is in a Green or Yellow tier and face coverings/masks are recommended or strongly recommended but not required the following week.

### **Health and Safety Protocols**

- District staff members will continue to be offered KN95 masks. Three-ply masks are also available for students and can be requested by families through the schools.
- The district will maintain enhanced air quality standards, hand sanitizer stations, encourage hand washing, and continue enhanced cleaning methods as strategies to protect students and staff.
- Students and staff with cases of COVID-19, themselves or in their home, will be asked to quarantine or isolate based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. Please notify the health office at your student's school if symptoms or positive tests for COVID-19 occur.

### **Vaccination and testing**

- The district continues to provide at-home COVID-19 rapid antigen tests for students and staff at no cost. Tests may be picked up at your school's front office to take home to have on hand for use if your student needs to be tested.
- The district's voluntary testing site continues to be available for our WBLAS students and staff members. The testing site, located near Normandy Park (2446 County Road F East, White Bear Lake, MN 55110), uses the CUE test, which is a rapid, molecular test that provides results in 25 minutes. Appointments can be made at: [bit.ly/624ctest](https://bit.ly/624ctest).

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen that mitigating the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools and communities requires a layered approach. The use of face coverings/masks is one strategy, along with increased air filtration, enhanced cleaning and sanitation, three feet of social distancing when possible, and other strategies in place to ensure students can attend school in person five days a week as planned.

We will continue to prioritize protecting the health and safety of staff and students and will monitor any impact of COVID-19 on our school operations.

Once again, thank you for your continued support and flexibility. During this challenging time, your efforts to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our schools and communities are appreciated.