

Mendon-Upton Regional School District COVID-19 Related Protocols and Procedures

Fall 2021



Introduction

The Mendon-Upton Regional School District takes the health and safety of our entire school community very seriously. A safe return to in-person school environments requires developing and maintaining strategies that create a culture of health and safety every step of the way. Specifically, it is not one mitigation strategy, but a combination of all of these strategies taken together that will substantially reduce the risk of transmission. Our primary objective is to provide a safe and healthy educational and work environment for students and staff, while keeping as many students as possible in school buildings and engaged in productive in-person learning.

On July 30th, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) released a joint memo on COVID-19 Guidance for Districts and Schools--Fall 2021. As outlined in the memo, all schools are required to be **in-person, full-time, five days a week** for the 2021-22 school year, and all previously released DESE health and safety requirements are lifted.

Guiding Principles

As we enter this school year, we maintain similar guiding principles for our Fall 2021 School Opening Plan that we have throughout the health crisis:

- **Building Strong School Community Relationships:** We will continue to focus on relationships with our students, families and staff to create a safe and supportive environment where all members can thrive and have a strong sense of belonging.
- **Prioritizing Health and Well-Being:** We will continue to prioritize the health and safety of students, staff, and the community, adapting as needed to shifting health metrics and local, state, and federal guidelines.
- **Supporting All Learners:** We will continue to support all learners to ensure they receive high-quality, engaging instruction of grade-level standards with just-in-time scaffolds when needed.
- **Pursuing our Strategic Vision for Learning:** We will continue to strive to create learning environments and programs where our students will engage in deeper learning experiences that are grounded in authentic tasks and meaningful connections to our Portrait of a Learner Competencies, despite challenges from the health crisis.

Health and Safety Protocols

The following is an outline of district protocols that we will continue to maintain in our schools based on guidance from DESE, the MA Department of Public Health, and local health officials. The last year of hybrid and then in-person learning provided us with a clear picture of what protocols were highly effective and impactful in our schools for reducing risks of transmission. Throughout this year, we will continue to monitor the impact of the protocols and adapt to revised state and federal guidelines as needed. The school buildings will communicate out school-specific guidelines and FAQs.. As we receive frequently asked questions, we will update our district FAQ document.

Masking

Consistent with the School Committee Policy EBCFA on face coverings, all students, staff, and visitors –regardless of vaccination status – must wear masks when indoors and on school busses. Face-masks are not required: 1) outside or 2) when an individual is working alone or in a segregated space. Mask breaks will continue and will be held outdoors or in large well-ventilated places whenever possible.

Physical Distancing

We will continue to maintain indoor physical distance whenever possible, and will prioritize the return of all students to school over distancing. Every school will continue to use outdoor spaces as much as possible.

Hand Hygiene

Students and staff are expected to maintain hand hygiene (hand washing or sanitizing) procedures from last year. Handwashing removes pathogens from the surface of the hands. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol) may be utilized when hand washing is not available.

Busses

All staff and students are required to wear masks on school busses. All students will be assigned seats on busses. Windows will remain open on busses at least two inches and adjusted as needed in inclement weather.

Lunch

When unmasked at lunch/snack time in an indoor space, students will be spaced at a minimum of 3 feet apart and facing the same direction. When students have finished eating, they should replace their masks. Each school will develop building-specific guidelines to support students' health and safety when eating and to maintain contact tracing protocols from last year.

Facilities and Maintenance

The district will continue its enhanced maintenance efforts to prevent in-school transmission, including hand hygiene protocols, ventilation and filtration strategies, and disinfecting/cleaning protocols from the Spring of 2021.

Maintained mitigation strategies include, but are not limited to:

- Classrooms will be cleaned daily and sanitized regularly. High traffic areas will be sanitized daily.
- All classrooms will continue to be supplied with a kit of cleaning products, masks, and hand sanitizer.
- MERV 13 filters will continue to be used throughout the district and replaced seasonally.
- Hand sanitizer stations will be located throughout the school buildings.
- All classrooms will continue to have air purifiers.

Classroom Setup

- Teachers and staff will set up their classrooms for the most appropriate learning environment for their students, while maintaining as much distancing as possible.
- Small groups and collaborative learning can take place if distancing is maintained.
- Students will be assigned seats and the seating charts will be shared with the building nurse and principals once established for the purposes of contact tracing.
- Weather and temperature permitting, classroom windows should be opened a minimum of one inch to increase air circulation.
- Classrooms should be cleared of any non-essential items or furniture to maximize available space for students.
- Fans by a window may be used to increase air circulation. Fans should not oscillate or blow directly on students.

Music Classes

- Music classes will continue to be held in larger spaces and outdoor spaces whenever possible. Students will be masked if singing and wind instrument players will wear masks with slits for their mouthpieces. Instrument covers and pads will continue to be used as they were last year. Students will have between 3-6 ft of distance as much as possible within classes.

Lockers

- Due to the lifting of health restrictions, lockers will be available for use in all of the buildings.

Shared Materials

- Health guidance has shifted related to shared materials and they are now allowed.

Vaccines

- The state and local health officials report weekly on the level of vaccination in our community. As vaccines become available for our younger students, we will again run vaccine clinics in schools if we are permitted to do so and will share local vaccine clinic information with our school families. We strongly encourage all staff and students to be vaccinated. This is the most important step to take to return our towns to more normal living. Additionally, vaccination status will directly impact consideration of being a close contact or not and will impact time in school.

COVID-19 Symptoms-Tracking-Quarantining Procedures

Covid-19 Symptoms

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves.^{1,2}

Unvaccinated individuals and any close contacts presenting these symptoms should follow testing and quarantine response protocols as outlined in Section 2 of this document.

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*

Close Contact Definition

A close contact is a person who has been within 6 feet of COVID-19-positive person, indoors, for at least 15 minutes over a 24 hour period.

Per DESE guidance, certain types of close contacts are exempt from COVID-19 protocols.

- **Asymptomatic, Fully-vaccinated Close Contacts** Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from quarantine and testing protocols. These individuals should still self monitor for symptoms.
- **Classroom Close Contacts:** Individuals who are exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in a classroom while both individuals were masked so long as the individuals maintained 3-ft distance are exempt from testing and quarantine protocols.

- **Bus Close Contacts:** Individuals on buses must be masked at all times per federal requirements. Thus, individuals who are masked when 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 diagnosed with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response.

Testing and Quarantine Guidelines

Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MADPH) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have issued the following testing, [close contacts, contact tracing and testing protocols](#), which we will follow.

Specifically, the Test and Stay program is a testing initiative intended for asymptomatic close contacts of individuals with confirmed COVID-19. This testing program will allow asymptomatic close contacts to remain in school if they receive an individual rapid antigen test (e.g. BinaxNOW) each school day and test negative. MURSD will be instituting this program. We believe this gives our staff and students the opportunity for the least disruptive learning experience.

This section outlines testing and quarantine response protocols for individuals – students and staff – who test positive for COVID-19, close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols, and symptomatic individuals. Each scenario outlines the duration of any recommended quarantine or isolation, the conditions to be met in order for the individual to return to school, and any additional considerations.

Overview of Protocol Categories:

- Protocol A: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19
- Protocol B: Protocol for asymptomatic close contacts
- Protocol C: Protocol for symptomatic individuals

Protocol A: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19

Protocol A for individuals who test positive

- **Duration:** Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases is a minimum of 10 days after symptom onset or after positive PCR or antigen test, if asymptomatic.
- **Return to school:** After 10 days⁵ and once they have:
 - o Been without fever for 24 hours (and without taking fever-reducing medications); and
 - o Experienced improvement in other symptoms; and
 - o Individuals who do not meet these criteria after 10 days may receive clearance from either public health authority contact tracers (the local board of health or Community Tracing Collaborative) or school health professional before returning to school.
- **Note:** Return to school should be based on time and symptom resolution. Repeat testing prior to return is not recommended.

⁵ If an individual tests positive as part of a group pooled test, the 10-day period begins the day the group pooled test returned a positive result.

Protocol B: Protocol for asymptomatic close contacts

Close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols and are asymptomatic follow the guidelines in Protocol B below. Please recall that all asymptomatic, fully vaccinated individuals are exempt from close contact testing and quarantine response protocols and therefore do not need to follow Protocol B. However, fully vaccinated individuals are expected to monitor for symptoms and stay home and get tested if they experience symptoms, in alignment with statewide guidance⁶ and Protocol C.

Note: In some cases, individuals may be asked to follow specific testing and quarantine response protocols (including durations for quarantine/isolation) provided by contact tracers or local health officials which may differ from the recommended protocols below.

Protocol B for asymptomatic close contacts who are not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols

Districts who participate in the statewide COVID-19 testing program or another similar testing program are strongly encouraged to utilize the new Test and Stay (B-1) protocol option to minimize the amount of time individuals are out of school. This testing and quarantine response protocol has been shown to be generally equivalent to quarantine for school-based contacts, and a safe alternative to at-home isolation.⁷ If schools choose not to participate in the statewide COVID-19 testing program and do not participate in a similar testing initiative, unvaccinated individuals follow the traditional quarantine (B-2) protocol.

Individuals who are part of the Test and Stay protocols may be eligible to participate in school sports and extracurricular activities, provided that they are in compliance with the applicable protocol. For events and sports that take place on non-school days, testing will still be required on those days to participate.

As part of Test and Stay, quarantine is still strongly recommended for individuals outside of school settings.

⁶ Guidance for People who are Fully Vaccinated Against COVID-19. Massachusetts DPH; August 2, 2021. Available at:

<https://www.mass.gov/guidance/guidance-for-people-who-are-fully-vaccinated-against-covid-19>

⁷ Bernadette C Young, David W Eyre, Saroj Kendrick, Chris White, Sylvester Smith, et. al. "A cluster randomized trial of the impact of a policy of daily testing for contacts of COVID-19 cases on attendance and COVID-19 transmission in English secondary schools and colleges." (July 2021). medRxiv. Available at:

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.07.23.21260992v1>

Protocol B-1 (Recommended): Test and Stay

- **Duration of Test and Stay:** 7 days from the date of exposure
- **Return to School:** Close contacts can remain in school and do not have to quarantine, as long as they:
 - o Are asymptomatic
 - o Wear masks in school at all times, other than when eating or drinking. When these individuals cannot be masked (i.e., when eating or drinking) they should maintain 3 feet of distance from other individuals to the extent feasible.
 - o Take a rapid antigen test (e.g., BinaxNOW) on each school day and receive a negative result. When the 7 days from date of exposure includes weekends or holidays, individuals should quarantine on weekends, and if they remain asymptomatic, upon return to school be tested immediately. If the individual remains negative, they can stay in school.
 - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14, and self-isolate at home if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or develops symptoms during the Test and Stay period or the 14 days following initial exposure, they should follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they should follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

Protocol B-2: Traditional protocol (if school does not have access to rapid daily testing or family or adult individual chooses not to participate in Test and Stay)

- **Duration:** Quarantine is at least 7 days from the date of exposure
- **Return to School:** After 7 days, returning on day 8, provided that they:
 - o Remain asymptomatic
 - o Receive a COVID test (PCR or rapid antigen) on day 5 or later and receive a negative result
 - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14, and self-isolate if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or within the 14 days following initial exposure, they follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

Protocol B-3: Alternate protocol for those who choose not to receive a COVID test

- **Duration:** Quarantine is at least 10 days from the date of exposure⁸
- **Return to School:** After 10 days, returning on day 11, provided that they:
 - o Have not experienced symptoms up to this point
 - o Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14 and self-isolate if symptoms develop.
- **Note:** If an individual has symptoms at the time they are designated as a close contact or within the 14 days following initial exposure, they follow the protocol for symptomatic individuals (Protocol C). If an individual tests positive at any time, they follow the protocol for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Protocol A).

⁸ CDC Science Brief: Options to Reduce Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing. Dec 2, 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>.

Protocol C: Protocol for symptomatic individuals

Protocol C applies to **vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals** who experience the COVID 19 symptoms listed in Section 1 applicable to their status.

Protocol C for symptomatic individuals:

Protocol C-1 (Recommended): Return to school post-symptoms with test

- **Duration:** Dependent on symptom resolution
- **Return to School:** Individuals may return to school after they:
 - o Have received a negative PCR test result for COVID-19. Note: So long as the individual is not a close contact, if a medical professional makes an alternative diagnosis for the COVID-19-like symptoms, the individual may use this recommendation (e.g., for influenza or strep pharyngitis) in lieu of a PCR test.
 - o Have improvement in symptoms
 - o Have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- **Note: If the symptomatic individual was a close contact who is not exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols, after symptoms resolve and they receive a negative PCR test, they should follow Protocol B-1 for Test and Stay.**
 - o If Test and Stay is not available or the family or adult individual opts not to participate, they follow Protocol B-2 or B-3.

Protocol C-2: Alternative protocol for symptomatic individuals who are not close contacts and choose not to receive a COVID test to return to school

- **Duration:** Isolation is at least 10 days from symptom onset⁹
- **Return to School:** After 10 days, returning on day 11, assuming they:
 - o Have improvement in symptoms
 - o Have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

⁹ CDC Interim Guidance on Ending Isolation and Precautions for Adults with COVID-19. Mar 16, 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html>.