

Chelmsford Public Schools

COVID-19 Health and Safety Protocols

Updated 8/6/24

On March 26, 2024, the state Department of Public Health (MDPH) reviewed the recent guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding isolation strategies for respiratory viruses, including COVID-19. In alignment with this guidance, the Department of Public Health has updated its recommendations for the general public to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. DPH's recommendations are available here: [Staying home to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses | Mass.gov](#).

According to their guidance, the 5-day isolation requirement has been discontinued, and schools should follow the recommendation for the general population to stay home when experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness, such as COVID-19, Flu, and RSV. Staying home when sick helps prevent the spread of germs. Please follow these recommendations to help [prevent the spread](#) of respiratory viruses:

- Get vaccinated for [flu](#) and [COVID-19](#).
- Stay home when you are sick (follow the recommendations below)
- Use hand and respiratory [hygiene](#)
- Wear a [mask](#) around others
- Get [tested](#) for flu and COVID-19 so you can get [treated](#)
- Avoid crowded areas and maintain [physical distance](#)
- Increase [fresh air](#)

There is no statewide masking mandate in schools. As always, any individual who wishes to continue to mask, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19, will be supported in that choice.

All medical decisions will be made in conjunction with the Chelmsford Health Department, the CPS School Physician, and the CPS Coordinator of Nursing Services. Decisions will be based on the local status of the COVID-19 pandemic and any updated DESE guidance or statewide protocol change. Please note the following guidelines for current best practices are subject to change as additional information about COVID-19 becomes available.

Coronaviruses are respiratory viruses and are generally spread through respiratory secretions (droplets from coughs and sneezes) of an infected person to another person. Given the nature of the virus, we know it is impossible to eradicate the risks associated with COVID-19. In Massachusetts, however, we have seen evidence that risk can be mitigated by receiving the vaccination for COVID-19 (by those individuals who are eligible), and engaging in good respiratory hygiene, proper handwashing, avoiding touching our eyes, nose, mouth or face, by staying home when sick. We expect that all students and staff will incorporate these healthy practices, making them a part of their daily routine in the 2024-2025 school year. DESE, MDPH,

and Chelmsford Public Schools continue to strongly recommend that all staff and eligible students receive the COVID-19 vaccine and, if eligible, the booster.

Per DESE and MDPH recommendations, districts K-12 should follow the below guidance:

- In most situations, a rapid antigen test, such as a self-test, is preferred to a PCR test.
- Contact tracing is no longer recommended or required, but schools or programs must continue to work with the Local Board of Health in the case of outbreaks.
- The Commonwealth is not recommending universal mask requirements, surveillance testing of asymptomatic individuals, contact tracing, or test-to-stay testing in schools. While masks are not required or recommended in these settings except for in school health offices when ill, any individual who wishes to continue to mask, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19, should be supported in that choice. For those who need or choose to mask, masking is never required in these settings while the individual is eating, drinking, or outside.
- All individuals are encouraged to stay up-to-date with vaccination as vaccines remain the best way to help protect yourself and others.

As of March 26, 2024, guidance for COVID-19 and respiratory illnesses is outlined below. School health staff should continue to use appropriate PPE for the management of known or suspected cases of COVID-19 and will continue to reference the updated “Comprehensive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)” guidance.

The single most important thing to do if you have symptoms of a respiratory virus is to **STAY HOME**. Our collective health relies, in part, on individual attention and responsibility. Please remain home if you are awaiting the results of a COVID-19 or Flu test and inform the school nurse if the test results are positive.

Covid-19 Guidance Update Summary

SITUATION	REQUIRED	RECOMMENDED	NOTES
Symptoms present & test is Positive	Stay home until you have not had a fever for at least 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medicine AND your symptoms are improving.	Mask and use prevention strategies for at least the first five days Stay home for 72 hours even if feeling better.	Inform your HCP A doctor's note is required for absences of more than three days in a row
Symptoms present & test is Negative	If you have a fever, stay home until you have not had a fever for at least 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medicine.	Masks and use prevention strategies for at least the first 5 days Repeat test after 48 hours	If the second test is negative, wait another 48 hours and test a third time.
No Symptoms & test is Positive	If you are symptom-free, you may come to school with a mask Monitor yourself for symptoms.	Use prevention strategies for at least the first five days Consider staying home for 72 hours to reduce the chances of spreading the illness	Inform your HCP
No Symptoms & known exposure	Consider wearing a mask. Use prevention strategies for at least the first five days after your last exposure Monitor yourself for symptoms.	Mask and use prevention strategies for at least the first five days	If symptoms develop, take a test Inform your HCP

Prevention Strategies

If you have new symptoms of a respiratory virus, such as a fever, sore throat, cough or a runny or stuffy nose, you should stay home and stay away from others in your household.

While you are at home:

- Get [tested](#) for COVID-19 and flu. Talk to your healthcare provider about getting [treatment](#) if you test positive.
- Stay away from others in your household. Wear a mask when you are around them..
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
- Clean [high-touch](#) surfaces (such as countertops, handrails, and doorknobs) often.
- You should stay home even if you don't know what virus is making you sick
- You may begin to resume normal activities if you have not had a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications AND your other symptoms are improving
- For the first five days after you resume normal activities, take these extra precautions:
 - Avoid crowded indoor spaces. Wear a mask anytime you are indoors around others
 - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
 - Avoid spending time with people who are at [increased risk for severe disease](#)

If you have tested positive for a respiratory virus and have symptoms:

If you have a fever or any other symptoms of respiratory illness, you should be at home. You may begin to resume normal activities with some precautions when:

1. You have not had a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, AND your symptoms are improving
2. Although not required, choosing to stay home for about 72 hours may help reduce the chances that you spread the virus to others.

Then, take the recommended extra precautions during the next 5 days:

- Avoid crowded indoor spaces
- Wear a mask indoors around other people

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
- Clean [high-touch surfaces](#) (such as countertops, handrails, and doorknobs) often.

If you have tested positive for a respiratory virus but do not have any symptoms:

You can still spread the virus. Take additional precautions to protect others from getting sick.

For at least the first five days, take these extra precautions:

- **Although not required, choosing to stay home for about 72 hours may help reduce the chances that you spread the virus to others.** While at home, you should:
 - Stay away from others in your household. Wear a mask when you have to be around them.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
 - Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
 - Clean [high-touch surfaces](#) (such as countertops, handrails, and doorknobs) often
 - Avoid crowded indoor spaces. Wear a mask anytime you are indoors around other people.
 - Avoid spending time with people who are at [increased risk for severe disease](#).

If you were exposed to someone with a respiratory virus illness (exposure precautions):

If you have been exposed to someone with a respiratory virus, you do not need to stay home as long as you remain asymptomatic. You may be able to spread a respiratory virus before developing symptoms.

To protect others, especially those with [risk factors for severe illness](#), take precautions:

- Wash your hands often
- Consider wearing a mask and avoiding crowded places
- Monitor yourself for symptoms carefully
- Stay home if you start to develop any signs of illness!

Protecting people with risk factors for severe illness from respiratory viruses:

When you are sick from a respiratory virus, you may spread germs for about ten days after your symptoms start or after a positive test, even if you don't have symptoms.

Be aware that some people around you may have risk factors for more severe diseases. Masking, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and covering your coughs and sneezes help protect them.

People at increased risk can include:

- Older adults
- Individuals with chronic underlying medical conditions, for example, heart, lung, liver, or kidney disease
- Pregnant people
- Young children, especially those under two years old
- People with weakened immune systems
- People with disabilities

Notify Health Officials

- By state and local laws and regulations, school nurses/administrators should notify the Chelmsford Health Department of any case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality per the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#).
- CPS Nursing Staff will collaborate with the Chelmsford Health Department to identify individuals who test positive for COVID-19. Individuals and families will be instructed to follow guidance protocols and [self-monitor for symptoms](#), following [CDC guidance](#) if symptoms develop.

Additional requirements:

- Families need to provide the school nurse with at least four (4) emergency contacts, indicating individuals who will be able to come to the school and pick up their child if they become ill during the school day. Dismissing sick children (and staff) in a timely fashion (within 30 minutes) is imperative for the safety of all.
- Families are asked to follow the Massachusetts travel guidelines, which can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-travel-order#international-travel->
- Students who are not wearing masks and are showing signs of illness will be asked to wear masks to reduce the spread of the illness until they leave the school premises.
- As recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Chelmsford Health Department, our protocols were created to ensure the safest

return to school possible. Learn more about illness care for a student or staff member during the school day: [Illness Management](#).

COVID-19 Test sites in the area:

AFC Urgent Care	44 Drumhill Road	Chelmsford	978-528-3033
Harvard Vanguard	228 Billerica Road	Chelmsford	617-629-6000
Lowell Community Health Center	161 Jackson Street	Lowell	978-937-9700
Circle Health	198 Littleton Road	Westford	978-323-0302
Circle Health	1574 Main Street	Tewksbury	978-323-5950

Additional testing sites in MA: <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-testing>

Lawrence General Hospital offers free asymptomatic testing for ALL Massachusetts residents. [Click here for the Lawrence COVID-19 Community Testing Center](#).

A [list of test sites is available here](#), and Massachusetts also has an [interactive testing map](#). Staff and students who have symptoms should also contact their primary care provider for further instructions.

For a list of available Vaccine Sites please click on the links below:

[COVID-19 vaccination locations](#)

[COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

[Protocol: Presence of the significant number of new cases in a municipality:](#)

In the case of a substantial outbreak specific to Chelmsford, as determined by the local Health Department or MDPH, the superintendent and school leaders will consult with the Chelmsford Health Department to decide whether or not to close a specific school, schools, or the entire district.

Districts and schools experiencing a high volume of cases can contact the DESE Rapid Response Help Center at 781-338-3500 for guidance. Notification should also be provided to local boards of health and district leadership.