



OUR DIRECTION FOR NAVIGATING
COVID-19 HEALTH GUIDELINES:

SAFETY
IS OUR TRUE NORTH



BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



July 2022

Dear Team BCPS,

We begin the third school year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in a better place. The health care system has responded to the pandemic threat by developing highly effective vaccines and therapeutics. By fall, 2022, all students in BCPS will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccines. Immunity from vaccines and prior infection has combined with effective treatments for COVID-19 infection to reduce the threat of severe illness and death.

Latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that schools put in place a “core set of infection disease prevention strategies as part of their normal operations.” These strategies will provide the foundation to prevent the spread of all contagious diseases in the school setting, including COVID-19. On top of this foundation, CDC recommends that schools add COVID-19 specific prevention practices such as masking and testing that are linked to the level of COVID-19 disease transmission in the community.

The updated plan for BCPS relies on the continued use of infection control practices and environmental controls. BCPS will continue to collaborate with federal and state partners to promote the availability of COVID-19 tests for persons who have symptoms and/or are linked to school outbreaks. Finally, BCPS will continue its partnership with the Baltimore County Department of Health to ensure access to vaccines for students and their families by providing school located COVID-19 and flu vaccine clinics.

As we enter the 22-23 school year, our team will continue to diligently monitor disease trends, consult with the Baltimore County Department of Health, meet with experts from Johns Hopkins and University of Maryland, and keep abreast of guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This plan will be updated as needed based on changes in disease prevalence, severity, and/or recommended practices.

Protecting and promoting the health of our students and staff, while preserving in-person learning remains our priority. We all play a vital role in promoting public health as we emerge from the pandemic. A strong partnership between BCPS staff, students, and parents is an essential component of a safe and positive learning environment. We can support one another by practicing good infection control practices like staying home when sick, washing hands, and covering coughs and sneezes. Most importantly, each member of Team BCPS is encouraged to get vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19. Vaccination remains the most effective strategy to protect ourselves and our community.

Sincerely,

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent



Plans for Monitoring Community Transmission

CDC established COVID-19 Community Levels to assist communities make decisions based on local context and needs. The COVID-19 Community Level is measured by three metrics:

- New COVID-19 hospital admissions per 100,000 residents in past 7 days
- Percent of staffed inpatient hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and
- Total new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents in past 7 days.

CDC’s COVID-19 Community Levels are:

COVID-19 Community Levels – Use the Highest Level that Applies to Your Community				
New COVID-19 Cases Per 100,000 people in the past 7 days	Indicators	Low	Medium	High
Fewer than 200	New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	<10.0	10.0-19.9	≥20.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	<10.0%	10.0-14.9%	≥15.0%
200 or more	New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	NA	<10.0	≥10.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	NA	<10.0%	≥10.0%

The COVID-19 community level is determined by the higher of the new admissions and inpatient beds metrics, based on the current level of new cases per 100,000 population in the past 7 days

COVID-19 Community Levels are calculated weekly on Thursdays. Updated data is published each weekday on the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#).

BCPS will continue to report its metrics weekly on its [COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#). BCPS will also report the total number of students and staff diagnosed with COVID and quarantined due to contact with persons with COVID as well as any school outbreaks.



Key Mitigation Strategies: Since the beginning of the pandemic, health experts have identified mitigation strategies that reduce the risk of catching or transmitting an infection. Studies from the 2020-21 school year revealed the effectiveness of these various strategies and are summarized in the CDC Science Brief, [Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools](#) and [Early Care and Education Programs](#). The CDC identified nine key prevention strategies that schools should use to slow the spread.

As BCPS enters the next phase of its response to the pandemic, we have organized CDC's recommended strategies into four key areas:

1. Promoting Vaccination.
2. Infection Control Practices – staying home when sick, handwashing, respiratory etiquette, and masking if community rates are high.
3. Environmental Controls- promoting ventilation, regular cleaning, and disinfection.
4. Disease Surveillance and Reporting –diagnostic testing of persons with symptoms at school, increased access to testing supplies, reporting of all cases, early identification of outbreaks, and monitoring of community rates.

To inform students, parents/guardians, and employees about these mitigation strategies, BCPS staff have adopted a multi-level communication plan that includes a variety of resources on the system website, regular updates to parents and staff about changes in the mitigation plan, employee education, and lessons for students about disease control practices.

PROMOTING VACCINATION

Resources: BCPS has a long-standing partnership with the Baltimore County Department of Health (BCDH) to promote access to vaccines, including school-required vaccinations for students, flu vaccines, and COVID-19 vaccines. In summer and fall of 2022, BCPS schools and school nurses will share information about the dates and locations of BCDH clinics that will provide pediatric vaccinations required for school. These clinics include mass clinics on weekends as well as walk-in and appointment-only clinics at the BCDH health centers. In October 2022, BCPS will continue its annual partnership with BCDH to host weekend flu vaccine clinics in schools throughout the county. BCPS school-based health centers operate in 13 schools and provide the full range of vaccines to students enrolled in the center. Throughout the year, BCPS will partner with BCDH to promote COVID-19 vaccines by sharing information about the location of weekly clinics and hosting mobile clinics at certain school sites and school events. Students, families and staff may access the schedule for the weekly vaccine clinics on the Baltimore County COVID-19 [Vaccine Hub](#).

INFECTION CONTROL PRACTICES

- Students and staff should stay home if they are sick:
 - Students and staff with symptoms that could indicate COVID-19 infection (such as fever, headache, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, diarrhea, vomiting, and/or fatigue) should stay

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home and test at home before returning to school or work.

- Persons with a positive home COVID test should alert their school nurse or supervisor of their positive test. See [COVID 19 Testing Quarantine, and Isolation FAQ](#) for details on the length of time a person with COVID-19 must stay home and precautions to follow upon return to school and/or work. They should also consult with their health care provider about the need for any COVID-19 specific treatment.
- Students and staff may return to school and/or work after COVID-19 infection after 5 full days of isolation (if symptoms have improved) and will be required to wear a mask through the 10th day.
 - Persons with COVID-19 infection who are not able to wear a mask may return to school and/or work without a mask if they have a have a negative test on day 5 or later. If they choose not to test and cannot mask, they may return after 10 days of isolation.
- Students and staff who are sick and have negative COVID-19 home test should stay home until they feel better. They may return to school if they are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) and do not have vomiting and/or diarrhea. Students and staff with persistent mild symptoms are strongly encouraged to wear a mask while at school or work until the symptoms resolve.
- Students and staff who have persistent illness symptoms and a negative COVID-19 test should remain home and consult with their health care provider.
- Students and staff with recent close contact with a person who has COVID-19 infection may continue to attend school. They are strongly encouraged to wear a mask for 10 days after the last date of exposure and be tested 3-5 days after exposure.
- Hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol should be used.
 - Times for hand washing include before and after meals, upon arrival to schools/offices, and home; before and after use of any shared items; after use of the restroom; after use of the playground; after sneezing/coughing, and any other time hands are contaminated.
- Students and staff must practice respiratory etiquette by covering coughs and sneezes with their arm or sleeve.
- Mask wearing is personal health choice (except for persons who are returning to school after COVID infection.) Masking has proven to be an effective health practice that prevents transmission of many respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
 - Persons with mild symptoms of illness, such as a runny nose, mild cough, or mild sore throat, are strongly encouraged to mask at school while symptoms are present. School nurses will strongly encourage students who visit the health suite for care for mild symptoms to wear a mask until their symptoms resolve.
 - Universal masking will be strongly encouraged for all persons when Baltimore County's COVID-19 Community Level is in CDC's High Transmission category.
 - Persons with recent COVID-19 infection are required to wear a mask if they return to school before the 10th day after onset of infection. Masking is optional for persons who have a negative test at least 5 days after the onset of illness and for all persons after 10 days have passed.



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- Persons with COVID-19 exposure and no symptoms are encouraged to wear a mask at school for 10 full days after last exposure to the person while contagious.

Resources: To support regular hand washing, BCPS staff maintain supplies of soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and tissues. BCPS has installed hand sanitizer stations in school lobbies and outside each cafeteria entrance. Schools and offices have supplemented handwashing supplies by providing hand sanitizer in strategic locations, including places where there is increased risk/frequency of use of shared items or contact between students/staff. Posters reminding students and staff to regularly wash hands are posted throughout schools and offices. Students will be taught and reminded about respiratory etiquette and handwashing on an ongoing basis. Staff and students will be periodically reminded of the reasons to stay home and the COVID-19 reporting requirements. Masks will be available to students and staff at all school sites.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

- BCPS staff will continue to provide safe and clean school environments by ensuring at least daily cleaning of buildings and disinfection of high-contact surfaces.
- All cleaning will involve the use of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved germicidal agents that kill coronavirus.
- Air purifiers have been placed in each school health suite and in all high school weight rooms to enhance ventilation.
- HVAC equipment will be equipped with the highest-grade filter appropriate for the unit. Units will be set to maximize exchange of outdoor air.
- Staff must immediately report concerns about malfunction of ventilation equipment to staff from the Office of Physical Facilities.
- School buses will be operated with roof hatches vented and windows lowered to the first position, weather permitting, to allow increased ventilation.

Resources: Staff from the Department of Facilities Management and Strategic Planning has verified the operation of ventilation dampers and controls to provide the proper number of air exchanges per hour. BCPS staff reviewed building mechanical systems to increase ventilation and filtration to the equipment's capacity.



DISEASE SURVEILLANCE AND REPORTING

- Employees with COVID-19 infection will be required to report all cases to BCPS' Office of Health Services through a secure database to ensure monitoring of cases at each school and office location.
- School nurses will report all cases of COVID-19 infection in students to the Office of Health Services to ensure daily monitoring of cases at each school, classroom and identified group (e.g., sports team).
- Community notices will be issued when a person with COVID-19 infection has been present in school when they were potentially contagious.
- Students and staff members who become sick while at school will be sent home from school.
 - Students will be provided with a home test kit and requested to test prior to return to school.
 - Staff members will receive a two-pack test kit upon return to school in summer 2022.
 - Families and staff may order additional tests [online](#) or at 1-800-232-0233.
- The Office of Health Services will monitor COVID-19 case reports for outbreaks and will report all COVID cases and suspected outbreaks to the Baltimore County Department of Health.
 - Students and staff members who are part of a school outbreak will be offered a COVID-19 test kit and requested to test prior to return to school.
 - Additional restrictions, such as stopping a high-risk activity that is experiencing an outbreak, will be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Baltimore County Department of Health.

Resources: School nurses will receive a supply of home test kits for distribution to students with COVID-19 symptoms at school and to persons involved in an outbreak. Staff will receive at least one COVID-19 two-pack test kit in summer 2022 for personal use, should they develop symptoms.

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