

Superintendent's COVID-19 Update

March 2, 2022

On Friday, February 18, the [MA EEC \(Department of Early Education and Care\) updated their masking regulations](#) statewide for schools and child care facilities. This update rescinded the mask mandate for all EEC preschools. This removed the mask mandate previously in place, and aligned with updated guidance for all K-12 Public Schools.

On Friday, 2-25-22, the [CDC released new color-coded COVID-19 guidance](#) based upon metrics collected from individual counties across the entire country. This guidance placed Norfolk County in the “low risk” (green) category with very limited associated recommendations.

The CDC guidance from Friday, 2-25 also included [new regulations regarding mask wearing on public transportation including K-12 Public School buses](#). This new guidance no longer requires mask wearing when on public transportation. While individual school districts may enact their own requirements, I do not recommend implementing a mask mandate while on school buses at this time.

This week's pooled testing at all schools shows very promising trends in the overall number of COVID-19 cases in our school community. On Monday and Tuesday of this week we tested a total of **361 pools** that included **1249 individuals**. We received 3 positive pools and 2 “inconclusive” results out of those 1249 individuals for a percent positivity of 0.2%. The 3 positive pools were all from Dedham Middle School. One “inconclusive” pool came from ECEC, and the other “inconclusive” pool came from Greenlodge. Both of the “inconclusive” pools ultimately revealed individual students who were positive. There were **NO POSITIVE OR INCONCLUSIVE POOLS** from Avery, Oakdale, Riverdale, and Dedham High School this week.

The most recent data regarding COVID cases in Dedham and the Dedham Public Schools are below:

[COVID-19 data for Town of Dedham](#)

[COVID cases in MA schools](#) (For comprehensive statewide results, click [HERE](#))

[Positive COVID Cases in DPS Schools](#) (please note that entries in yellow represent 2 weeks worth of data as these figures were obtained during the February vacation week.

[DPS Pooled Testing Participation and Results](#)

As the School Committee is aware, on Monday, 2/28 all schools moved to a “masks highly recommended” (optional) status for all indoor activities. When students and staff returned to schools on Monday this week, I asked Principals to estimate the percentage of staff and students who chose to wear masks at the start of the day. Faculty and staff were very attuned to the need for supporting students regardless of their mask-wearing choices, and I believe we have largely been successful in supporting all students. Here were their responses (all data is anecdotal and approximate):

Percent Wearing Masks		
Monday, February 28		
School	Students	Staff
DHS	60%	40%
DMS	35%	45%
Avery	60%	40%
Greenlodge	25%	10%
Oakdale	50%	50%
Riverdale	50%	10%
ECEC	60%	10%

In conversations with our leadership team, we agreed that the best way to approach this transition period into optional masking was to gradually allow students and staff to become more comfortable with these new conditions, and to not change anything too dramatically and too quickly.

For instance, most current middle school students have not experienced eating in a cafeteria at group lunch tables. Their entire lunch eating experience has been eating at individual desks set up in the cafeteria, gym, and library. There are many obvious challenges that this initially presented, but kids have gotten used to this and we didn't want to immediately shift to "unmasking" AND then layer on top of that the possible social anxiety that group seating would introduce. As students become more comfortable, more typical seating and social experiences will be added.

By all accounts, the transition to a "mask optional" environment has been without incident or discomfort. Some kids and staff continue to wear masks while others do not. Everyone is being supported for their individual choices. I sense that as the data continues to show low rates of infection and people become more at ease, there will be more people who are comfortable removing their masks.